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ABSTRACT

This guide for literacy tutors and educators provides basic information about people labeled as having an intellectual disability, along with practical teaching strategies and tips on designing inclusive literacy programs. It also raises questions to challenge assumptions and encourage program re-examination. The first four short chapters discuss making the links among literacy, disability, and human rights; the meaning of "people with an intellectual disability"; defining literacy; and what is known about the literacy levels of people with intellectual disabilities. Subsequent chapters focus on: (1) the effects of exclusion from the mainstream, in six personal stories of the lives of people with disabilities; (2) barriers to full participation for these people; (3) specific strategies for tutors and educators; (4) components of successful programs; (5) an outline for using this guide for training; and (6) important themes, relevant readings, discussion guidelines, and print and organizational resources. A list of Canadian provincial and territorial literacy contacts and coalitions is provided. An appendix presents a guide to choosing an inclusive literacy program for people with intellectual disabilities, their families, friends, and support workers. (DB)

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Speaking of

Making Literacy Programs Accessible to People with an Intellectual Disability

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A Guide for Tutors and Educators

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Speaking of Equality:

Making Literacy Programs Accessible to People with an Intellectual Disability

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A Guide for Tutors and Educators

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The ROEHER Institute

Canada's National Institute for the Study of Public Policy Affecting Persons with and Intellectual Impairment and Other Disabilities

The Roeher Institute is Canada's leading organization to promote the equality, participation and self-determination of people with intellectual and other disabilities, by examining the causes of marginalization and by providing research, information and social development opportunities.

To fulfill this mandate, The Roeher Institute is engaged in many activities: research and public policy analysis; publishing; information dissemination; and training, education and leadership development.

The Roeher Institute acts as a centre for the development and exchange of ideas, all of which are founded on a new way of looking at disability and society. It critically examines issues related to the well-being and human rights of persons with an intellectual impairment and other disabilities. Based on its examination of these issues, The Institute raises awareness about the barriers that affect people's full participation and prevent them from exercising their rights. The Institute also presents policy and program alternatives.

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Contents

Foreword vii

Chapter 1.

Literacy, disability and human rights: Making the links 1

Chapter 2.

What do we mean by "people with an intellectual disability"? 5

Chapter 3.

Defining literacy 7

Chapter 4.

What do we know about the literacy levels of people with an intellectual disability? 11

Chapter 5.

The effects of exclusion from the mainstream 13
  - Personal stories of the lives of people with disabilities 23
    - *The closing of an institution* 23
    - *A will to learn: The experiences of a self-advocate in the education system* 25
    - *Margaret goes to school* 28
    - *A real home* 31
    - *What does it mean to be labelled and poor?* 33
    - *A family love story* 35

Chapter 6.

Barriers to participation 37

Chapter 7.

Strategies for tutors and educators 43

Chapter 8.

Components of successful programs: A checklist 47

Chapter 9.

Using this guide for training 53

Notes 56

Resources 57

National, provincial and territorial literacy contacts and coalitions 63

Appendix:

Speaking of Equality: A guide for choosing an inclusive literacy program for people with an intellectual disability, their families, friends and support workers 67

Foreword

The world is changing. Yesterday's job skills are no longer useful. You need to upgrade, become smarter, become faster and more efficient. You need knowledge and access to information.

Peering through this new window, you see the information superhighway sprawl across a universe of knowledge chaos. Data flies along this highway. You'd better be on the highway.

But what about if you are among the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have a hard time even getting *on* the bus? What if you are among the group of people who find themselves being pushed further and further back from the windows that look onto the information super highway?

No one should be excluded, we are told. Everyone has human rights. Our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* says so. Our human rights laws say so. The entire civilized world says so through the United Nations. This includes the right to be treated fairly and not to be discriminated against. It includes the right to an education.

But many people with disabilities continue to be undereducated. What are the chances of escaping discrimination if you do not have the education you need — if you cannot read or write?

If basic literacy was important in yesterday's world, it is crucial for surviving today and tomorrow. Already, nearly a third of a million Canadian adults of working age who have disabilities feel that their reading skills are not adequate for daily living. More than two million feel that their abilities to read and write are less than excellent. When asked whether they have ever thought of taking additional training to improve their reading and writing skills, most say "no". Many others indicate that they might, "someday." What are their chances of thriving in the brave new world that is upon us?

People with intellectual disabilities face particular challenges in this new world. As we learned when we undertook our study, *Literacy and Labels: A Look at Literacy Policy and People with a Mental Handicap*, an important examination of the relationship between literacy and intellectual disability, many people cannot read or write because no one took the time to teach them. No one took the time to teach them because they were considered unable to learn. Because they were considered unable to learn, educators overlooked what was possible. Because educators overlooked the possibilities, developers of literacy programs and resources did so, too.

True, things are a little better. More people labelled as having an intellectual disability are going to regular schools. Not as many are being put away in institutions. Some are finding real jobs that pay enough to live on. However, the situation is still difficult for many. And, until more people have better opportunities to learn basic reading and writing skills, the situation will probably get worse.

This guide for literacy tutors and educators was produced to help address the challenge. It provides basic information that tutors and educators need to become more knowledgeable about people labelled as having an intellectual disability. It tells about their world, their struggles and triumphs. It provides stories of success and hope, to help break through myths that create distance and fear. It provides practical teaching strategies, constructive tips on designing inclusive programs and notes on additional resources that educators have found helpful. It also raises important questions that can challenge assumptions and help educators and tutors re-examine their programs.

Two companion volumes have been produced along with this guide. One is a similar guide directed at literacy program managers and coordinators. The other is a guide to choosing an inclusive literacy program directed at people with an intellectual disability, their families, friends and support workers. Because it will be used as a resource by tutors, educators, program managers and coordinators, the guide for people with an intellectual disability, their families, friends and support workers, has also been included as an appendix to this guide.

These three guides are the result of the insight, creativity and commitment of many people. A number of people with a wealth of experience contributed their comments, suggestions and information about resources. We would like to express our thanks to Lee Weinstein, Liz Wyman, Nancy Friday-Coburn, Susan MacDonald, Alfred Jean Baptiste, Shirley Thrasher, Neil Pauls, John Stanley, Sue Turner, Susan Devins, Doug Rankin, Pat Hatt, Michele Neary, Kelly Agazzi, Patricia Bowman, Angela Tessler, Judy Carter-Smith, Julie Stone, Aileen Wight-Felske, Rita Raegele, Jean Rasmussen, Donna Lunau, Harold Alden, Marilyn Ferrel, Penny Laughren, Jane Field, Krishna Persaud, Linda Brown, Paula Copeland, Gladys Watson and Bill Puszati.

In addition, sincere thanks go to the funder of this project, the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada. Their commitment to addressing issues of literacy and disability has helped raise the importance of this issue, nationally and internationally. Without their support, the development of this guide, like many other important resources that have entered the literacy field recently, would not have been possible.

Finally, recognition must be extended to the many people with intellectual disabilities who, over the years, have insisted they want to read and write, who have declared it unfair to be denied this dream, and who have persisted to prove their dream is achievable. Thanks to their leadership, encouragement and advice, many others are coming to understand what they knew all along.

Cameron Crawford
Assistant Director

Chapter I.

Literacy, disability and human rights:

Making the links

> **Literacy is a basic human right for the advancement of all people around the world ...**
>
> **Justice demands that the problems of illiteracy must be attacked in a world that possesses all the means and resources to do so ...**
>
> **In order to promote social justice and equality, the special needs of oppressed people must be recognized and met in literacy programs. This includes: women, indigenous peoples, minorities, the unemployed, and people who have been labelled and excluded.**
>
> ***Declaration and recommendations from the International Literacy Seminar, Toronto, Canada, 1988***

The right to an education for everyone is generally understood in this country. This right is stated in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. It is included in most of Canada's provincial education acts. Canada's provincial and territorial human rights laws prohibit discrimination against people with physical or mental disabilities. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* enshrines the right to equal treatment of people without discrimination based on mental or physical disability. In theory, therefore, people with a disability — who represent over 15.5 per cent of Canada's population[1] — should have equal access to educational opportunities, including literacy education.

The reality is that many adults with disabilities continue to be denied access to literacy education. A range of barriers make it difficult — often impossible — for people with disabilities to participate in literacy programs:

☐ being on waiting lists for programs that are underfunded;

☐ being told they do not meet the eligibility criteria for programs;

☐ feeling that literacy programs are not "for them";

- ☐ being enrolled in programs where educators feel ill-equipped to provide them with appropriate supports;
- ☐ facing buildings that are inaccessible or a program that is simply unfriendly to their presence.

Because of this exclusion, many people with disabilities are denied the opportunity to develop the basic skills that are recognized as essential for full participation as citizens.

This lack of access to literacy education is discriminatory. It runs counter to the principles of equality and justice. The consequences of being denied the opportunity to develop literacy skills are well known: people are marginalized and denied many of the benefits of full participation in our society.

In contrast, inclusive literacy education that is learner-centred and values the life experiences, interests and knowledge of the learner opens doors to greater participation for people with disabilities. Through learner-centred literacy, people improve their skills, build their self-esteem and expand their social and community contacts. Critical literacy, which helps people improve their skills and develop their abilities to think critically, enables people to have a greater voice in the larger community.

Much can be done to ensure that people with disabilities are included in literacy programs, that their right to an education is respected and that they can develop the tools needed to participate as full and equal citizens. Literacy tutors and educators can play a significant role in ensuring respect for the right to literacy. They can have a direct impact by eliminating barriers to literacy education for people with disabilities. They can address the barriers that exist both in their own programs and in the larger social systems by influencing public policy. And they can encourage a learner-centred critical approach to literacy that fosters the development of skills needed for personal empowerment and social change.

It is important to emphasize that some literacy programs already provide inclusive literacy education to significant numbers of people who may be considered intellectually disabled. How these programs have defined literacy education and their most useful methods will be covered in this manual.

Literacy is a basic human right for the advancement of all people.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 26

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations General Assembly, December 1993)

Rule 6, Education

States should recognize the principle of equal primáry, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Article 15

(1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Chapter II.

What do we mean by "people with an intellectual disability"?

People with an intellectual disability have an intellectual or a perceptual impairment that means they master basic and social skills more slowly. Individuals with this impairment may require particular supports and resources in order to be included and participate fully in literacy programs. Some individuals may also have motor or sensory impairments that require accommodation.

Over the years, many labels have been applied to people who have an intellectual disability. Most of these labels have contributed to, or reinforced, negative stereotypes. They tend to highlight "deficits". As a result, often these labels limit rather than expand the possibilities for people who require accommodations or adaptations. The labels often fail the individual. The label itself may be meaningless to the person; what matters are their abilities and strengths, their interests and life experiences.

Regardless of labels, literacy programs committed to providing equal access to people with disabilities need to focus on the supports an individual requires to develop literacy skills. Providing equal access to literacy education means accommodating each individual's particular needs no matter what labels may have been attached to them.

Chapter III.

Defining literacy

The definition of "literacy" is the subject of much debate. In the substantial body of literature on the topic, the term is described in a variety of ways. How it is defined, and how problems that result from low levels of literacy are framed, shape the policies, programs and materials developed to address the problems. "Basic literacy" is often defined as the acquisition of the reading and writing skills essential for full participation in our society.[2] In an expanded definition, the concept of literacy goes beyond reading, writing and numeracy to ensuring that people acquire the life skills and knowledge necessary for development.[3] The Paul Young Story (see page 8) illustrates how acquiring literacy skills can be a gateway to the development of other life skills and knowledge.

Learner-centred literacy and critical literacy

Learner-centred literacy and critical literacy are important concepts in developing and delivering inclusive literacy education. A learner-centred approach to literacy requires that the learning process be mutual. Tutors and educators must be able to acquire knowledge from the adult learners themselves about their interests, goals, experiences and individual barriers to education. This may be particularly challenging to tutors and educators who have assumptions about the abilities of certain learners. In addition, people may have had little opportunity to exercise choice or decision making in their own lives. Therefore, it may take some time before learners are able to express their interests in, and desires for, their learning. The learner-centred approach has the potential to empower people who have largely had decisions made by others on their behalf.

The concept of critical literacy is also an important one. It refers to the acquisition, by individuals and groups who have been marginalized in society, of the means to communicate their experiences and interests in public discourse.

For people who have been labelled, the critical literacy framework is especially relevant. It challenges assumptions about the relationship of the individual to society as well as the standards for literacy that are established in society. The critical literacy perspective suggests that some individuals lack literacy skills because of their marginalization and discrimination in society. Within this framework, reading and writing skills are understood as a means for challenging society as well as for personal empowerment. Literacy education, when understood this way, is not simply about gaining numeracy or literacy skills. It is also about helping people develop the skills to advocate more effectively on their own behalf both for themselves and for broader social change.

The Paul Young Story

Paul Young was segregated during his childhood and early adulthood. He went to a segregated special school until Grade 5 and worked in a sheltered workshop for 12 years. Although he expressed a desire to work in radio, his social worker told him he would never be able to, and that it would be six months before he would be able to work as a dishwasher in a restaurant. It was also expected that he would never be able to drive a car. In direct contradiction to these pessimistic predictions, Paul has been an employee of CBC for 12 years now, is a member of the employee's union with seniority, owns his own home, has been married nine years, has his driver's license and owns his own car.

Paul's own determination and tenacity made all this possible. He worked as a volunteer at the CBC for seven years, making friends and learning the trade, before he was hired as a trainee.

In the early stages, Paul's employment depended on his ability to progress and acquire skills. Paul now has a Grade 10 education, which he earned at night school. He began by upgrading his literacy skills. He says that what he learned at school was nothing compared to what he has learned on the job, including social skills and improved coordination. "It's because of the job I can drive a car," he affirms. "My coordination and attention span weren't very good when I got out of the sheltered workshop. The nature of the job is that you have to watch your audio levels so the audio sounds don't get muffled or distorted. You have to concentrate on that when you're doing recording or dubbing or news items or a live show. You have to do what the director tells you and watch the announcer for signs. You have to be four or five steps ahead all the time. With that and with pushing buttons and sliding knobs, my attention span, my concentration and the use of my hands developed. Now I am capable of driving a car."

***Adapted from entourage**, Volume 7, Number 4, Winter 1992-93.*

Literacy from a critical perspective means that programs assist learners to:

- ☐ improve their basic skills in reading, writing, numeracy, communication, life skills, abstract thinking and general knowledge;
- ☐ increase their abilities to think critically;
- ☐ build self-confidence;
- ☐ increase their understanding of self;
- ☐ participate more fully in society;
- ☐ create language and culture;
- ☐ enhance the quality of their own lives;
- ☐ work towards empowerment and social change.[4]

Shattering the myths

☐ **It is a myth that the individual is to blame for his or her own lack of literacy skills.** Poverty, lack of child support, illness, lack of information about available programs, language barriers and isolation in the community all contribute to low literacy levels.

☐ **It is a myth that literacy is a social issue, not an economic one.** As the structure of the workforce changes, as the demands of technology increase and as economies shift to highly skilled service sectors, investments in people have become critical.

☐ **It is a myth that the existing formal education system is the solution to our problems.** Simply re-entering the formal education system is not appropriate for many adults lacking literacy skills. Instead, the community, employers and unions must play an increasing role, working together to provide support and training better suited to learners' needs.

☐ **It is a myth that those with poor reading and writing skills are less intelligent than others.** Those who want or need to upgrade their literacy skills are people with many other abilities and strengths. Many have had to compensate for their lack of literacy skills in imaginative ways.[5]

Chapter IV.

What do we know about the literacy levels of people with an intellectual disability?

A number of problems arise in trying to measure the level of literacy among adults with an intellectual disability. These include difficulties in defining intellectual disability, in sampling adults in the population and in measuring levels of literacy.

☐ Defining intellectual disability

Defining "intellectual disability" is itself a problem. There are wide variations in the types and degrees of impairment among individuals who are labelled intellectually disabled. In addition, the consequences of the impairment vary in each individual depending on the learning processes in which he or she is engaged. Finally, the meaning and the consequence of an impairment will depend on the social and cultural environment in which the person lives.[6]

☐ Sampling adults

In addition to the difficulties in defining what an intellectual disability is, selecting a sample of the population to be studied poses problems. A major difficulty with identifying a survey sample is that individuals are required to "self-report" their disability. Because of the stigma associated with the labels of intellectual disability, many individuals are reluctant to apply the term to themselves.

☐ Measuring levels of literacy

Finally, there are difficulties in measuring the level of literacy in any population. The measures must be sensitive to the different needs for literacy, at the same time providing a standardized measure for analysis. Researchers have noted, for example, that grade level attained is not necessarily a good indicator of functional literacy.

Researchers have recently developed measures more reflective of the functional definition of literacy than indicators of schooling.

In a survey, instead of classifying persons lacking literacy skills into two groups (basic illiterates and functional illiterates), Statistics Canada established four "comfort" levels with respect to reading, writing and numeracy. It was found in this study, that 38 per cent of Canadians have varying degrees of problems with reading. Of these, 16 per cent experience major difficulties, whereas 62 per cent are capable of satisfying most of the requirements for fluent reading.[7]

For persons with an intellectual disability, the only measures currently available are the conventional measures of grade level attainment. The data indicate that 71.1 per cent of adults with an intellectual disability have less than a Grade 9 education.[8] This compares with 13.9 per cent of adults **without** disabilities who have less than a Grade 9 education. It is likely, therefore, that adults with an intellectual disability have a literacy rate significantly below the general population in Canada. Although this suggests a high rate of illiteracy among this population, the data cannot, for reasons discussed above, be considered a valid estimate of literacy for this group. In fact, we do not really know what the literacy level is for people with an intellectual disability.

Highest education level	% of adults with an intellectual disability	% of adults (working age) without an intellectual disability
No schooling	29.7	0.6
Grade 1 to 4	19.2	1.8
Grade 5 to Grade 8	22.2	11.5
Grade 9 to Grade 10	11.3	13.7
Grade 11 to Grade 13	8.3	13.0
High school graduates	2.4	13.6
Post secondary	6.9	45.7

Source: Statistics Canada, Health and Activity Limitation Survey, Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1986.

Chapter V.

The effects of exclusion from the mainstream

Although precise statistics are not available, there are reasons to believe that the majority of people with an intellectual disability have not had access to literacy education. Similarly, in spite of a number of positive changes in recent years, this population has been denied access to a range of benefits generally available to non-disabled citizens.

It is important to situate the lack of access to literacy education within the context of exclusion and denial of basic rights that has largely characterized the experiences of people with an intellectual disability. Many continue to be marginalized and socially isolated. Many have not had the opportunity to take part in activities most of us take for granted and they still face widespread discrimination and negative attitudes. Most policies and programs — including those in the literacy field — are designed in a way that excludes people with intellectual disabilities from participation.

The following is a profile of the impact of exclusion on people's lives. It underlines how people have been affected by their lack of access to community life, education and employment. The portrait that emerges underscores the need for inclusive literacy education from a critical, learner-centred perspective. This allows people to improve their literacy and numeracy and other skills, as well as have access to the necessary information so they can demand and be accorded their rights.

❑ Segregation, institutionalization and the medical model

For much of this century, people with an intellectual disability were physically excluded and segregated from the community. Until recently great numbers of people were confined to large institutions, asylums or hospitals. The medical profession was preoccupied with classification and the measuring of intelligence with a focus on "deficits". There was widespread fear and prejudice in the population-at-large.

The institutional model was first seriously questioned as an appropriate response to the needs of persons with an intellectual disability in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There was a growing realization that better supports could actually minimize the degree of handicap people experienced through an intellectual disability. It was also being recognized that it was unjust to deprive people of their rights on the basis of disability.

Today, most provinces and territories have policies supporting deinstitutionalization. A number of provinces have a stated commitment to closing their institutions and are in the process of moving people back to their communities. Still, an estimated 10,000 adults with an intellectual disability and over 500 children live in institutions in Canada. Many others live in nursing homes, chronic care hospitals or private institutions.

Partnerships to close institutions

During the next five years, more than 300 Canadians with intellectual disabilities will return to homes in the community after years of institutionalization. Their release follows historic agreements between the Canadian and provincial Associations for Community Living and the provincial and federal governments to eventually close institutions in six provinces.

Newfoundland: Newfoundland will support all 126 residents with an intellectual disability to move from the Waterford Hospital into the community. By 1996, no one will be housed in an institution simply because they have an intellectual disability.

Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan has pledged to support the move of 30 people from Moose Jaw's Valley View Centre into the community.

Manitoba: Manitoba will link 25 people with intellectual disabilities currently in institutions or at risk to volunteer support networks in their communities.

Prince Edward Island: About 20 people will leave Hillsborough Hospital. The regional boards of the province's new department of health and community services will provide services to the former residents.

Ontario: Ontario will build on its Multi-year Plan of Deinstitutionalization. Communities are being prepared to receive people with intellectual disabilities from institutions.

As a result of deinstitutionalization, many more people now live in their communities — with their families, in group homes, in apartments or houses with friends or by themselves.

Education

In many communities across Canada, students are still segregated in special schools or in special classes in regular schools. This segregation stigmatizes children with disabilities and deprives them and other children of the opportunity to learn about, and from, one another. Many children continue to be denied entry to their community schools. They are bused to segregated schools or ghettoized in special classes in regular schools.

There has been and continues to be an enormous investment in segregated education for people with disabilities. But the legacy of the segregated system is that relatively few people with disabilities have completed high school. As a result, too few have the literacy and numeracy skills to cope with contemporary Canadian society. Without these skills, few satisfy the entrance requirements for post-secondary education and training. And consequently, too few have jobs.

Fortunately, in recent years there has been a growing recognition by parents, teachers and school administrators of the many advantages for all students to having children with disabilities integrated in regular classes. There are numerous examples of children across Canada who have been successfully integrated in their community schools.

- Fourteen per cent of Canadians with disabilities who are between 15 and 40 years old — nearly 90,000 Canadians — have obtained only primary-level education.

- Over one million working-age Canadians with disabilities have not graduated from high school. Nearly half of these people (47.8 per cent) have been outside the labour force for 18 months or longer. [9]

Inclusion success stories:

- Under the *New Brunswick Education Act*, integration is mandatory. It is simply normal practice for students with disabilities to attend regular classes in their neighbourhood schools.

- In a landmark case in Ontario early in 1995, the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that children with mental and physical disabilities should not be segregated from other students in the school system. The ruling concluded that Ontario's *Education Act*, by providing wide latitude for school boards to segregate "exceptional children", violates children's rights under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to be free of discrimination based on their disabilities.

- A number of school districts in Canada have clearly articulated the goal of full integration for students with disabilities.

☐ Employment

Employers often focus on an individual's disability, rather than seeing what the person can offer as an employee. As a result, people with an intellectual disability often find themselves in segregated "sheltered workshops", working in congregated settings with other people with disabilities, where they are usually paid well below minimum wage.

To change this situation, a commitment is needed to develop and sustain creative and innovative approaches to employing people with intellectual disabilities. Efforts require the active participation of people with disabilities, educators, employers, employees, service providers and governments.

In a recent study on employment and people with disabilities in Canada,[10] it was found that involvement in the labour force is affected not only by severity or type of disability, but also by:

☐ age and gender;

☐ the province or territory in which people happen to live;

☐ whether people have been discriminated against and whether they are informed about their rights;

☐ whether the need for aids, devices and personal supports is being met;

☐ education level;

☐ access to training;

☐ problems around transportation;

☐ the use of rehabilitation services.

- Only 28 per cent of people with intellectual disabilities have jobs.
- Sixty-one per cent of people with intellectual disabilities with jobs work in sheltered settings.
- Employment equity arrangements and legislation have had only limited impact on raising the labour force participation of people with disabilities.
- Many thousands of people do not get the supports, aids or devices they require for work.
- People with disabilities may have to declare themselves "unemployable" to get the support services, medications and devices they require.[11]

Poverty

The lack of educational and employment opportunities has resulted in poverty for many people with disabilities. Impoverishment is a consequence of exclusion and contributes to further isolation. For example, not having enough money deprives people of opportunities to participate in activities and in the social life of their communities. For people with disabilities who are poor, the cycle of poverty is compounded by additional discrimination due to their disability.

The relationship between poverty and illiteracy is well documented. Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of illiteracy. Low levels of literacy increase the chances of being poor and, in turn, poverty makes it more likely that one will not have literacy skills.

Even if increased literacy skills can expand employment opportunities for a person with a disability, paid employment will not necessarily end a person's poverty. A high percentage of people with a disability in the labour force are paid at or near minimum wage. In spite of receiving some benefits for disability-related costs, 40 per cent of adults with a disability report out-of-pocket expenses related to their disabling condition.

- Eighty-nine per cent of adults with an intellectual disability have an income of under $10,000.[12]

Health status

One of the most significant consequences of poverty is the greater likelihood of lower health status. For those who are poor and lacking in literacy skills, their health status is in "double jeopardy": not only are they more likely to suffer the consequences of poor living conditions, but because of low levels of literacy they may not be able to use information to assist them in changing their living conditions.

Reasons people who lack literacy skills have more health problems:

☐ Incorrect use of medication

People who cannot read directions on medication bottles may take overdoses and mix up different medications.

☐ Not following health instructions

People with low literacy skills may be unable to read written information or may not understand verbal instructions.

☐ Safety risks

People with low literacy skills may not be able to read and comprehend safety warnings. [13]

☐ Friendship and community

In recent years, it has been recognized that many people with disabilities have few friends. This situation exists not only for individuals who are entirely segregated or isolated from their communities, but also for many people who live in their communities.

Segregation can be a major barrier to the development of friendships, since it prevents individuals from meeting a broad range of people, cutting them off from potential sources of intimate friends. Services, professionals and even volunteers can also present obstacles if they impose structures and policies that do not allow true friendships to develop and flourish. Attitudes and negative stereotypes are significant barriers to relationships: few people believe that valued citizens in our communities are capable of, or even interested in, developing close friendships with people who have been labelled intellectually disabled.

☐ Violence and abuse

People with disabilities, like other marginalized groups, are particularly vulnerable to various forms of violence and abuse. The context in which people with disabilities live shapes the types and frequency of violence they experience. People with disabilities are likely to experience systemic discrimination on a daily basis. They often find themselves in situations where others have power over them. The violence against them, therefore, includes both overt and subtle forms of abuse that may or may not be considered criminal acts.

Violent and abusive acts against people with disabilities may involve any combination of:

- ☐ physical force (e.g., beating);
- ☐ physical actions that take the form of care (e.g., administration of medications, restraint or other treatments);
- ☐ unwanted physical actions of a sexual nature (e.g., unwanted sexual intercourse or fondling);
- ☐ the denial of rights, necessities, privileges or opportunities by persons who are in a position to promote or safeguard the well-being of the person affected;
- ☐ communications that are seen as threatening (e.g., explicit threats or stalking), tormenting (e.g., harassment) or insulting (e.g. "speaking down" to, or using derogatory terms when speaking to, the individual);
- ☐ lack of proper action such as the neglect of, or failure to respond effectively to, incidents that have significantly compromised the individual's well-being. [14]

The development of a strong disability rights movement has played a significant role in increasing public awareness and influencing policy direction over the past several years. This movement, largely based on a human rights framework and including organizations such as People First and the Canadian Association for Community Living, continues to challenge traditional medical and charitable approaches to disability.

In conclusion, it is important to note that many adult literacy learners — whether or not they have a disability — have a shared experience of economic and social exclusion. Men and women who have difficulty with reading and writing are more likely than others to be poor, unemployed or underemployed. They are told in a myriad of ways that they do not have the skills and knowledge that are needed to contribute to community life.[15] For people with an intellectual disability, the majority of whom lack literacy skills, this message of exclusion is compounded by the many barriers they face because they have a disability.

In view of this, there is a pressing need to eliminate the barriers to inclusive, learner-centred literacy education. Access to literacy in environments that accommodate individual needs, are tolerant of diversity and seek to empower adult learners can contribute to reversing the exclusion and isolation. Inclusive learner-centred literacy programs can provide an environment that fosters personal development and the acquisitions of skills to lobby for further societal change.

The following are personal stories of the lives of people with disabilities.

The Closing of an Institution:

Life in the William F. Roberts

BY ALENE STEINBACH
(as told by Bobby)

This is a story of a young man who has been labelled mentally handicapped and who has had very few choices in life and little control over his own destiny:

For years I felt uneasy and afraid. I looked at other families and saw that most kids weren't ashamed or afraid of where they have lived. But how many of us have or would want to remember growing up in an institution?

I lived at home with my family until I was four years old. Then I went to live in the William F. Roberts Hospital School in Saint John, New Brunswick. My family loved me but felt that it was best for me to move out as there was nothing for me to do.

I remember that there were a lot of young kids at the Hospital School and I felt that this was "not a good place to be". I had difficulty pronouncing words and I wanted to learn to read but there wasn't anybody available to help me. People did not expect or want me to learn to read or write. What for? There wasn't money to waste on what was felt to be a useless education.

I still ask myself, "Why do people have to holler?" If I was talking to someone, the supervisor would use a big spoon to hit me across the knee. I did not like that. When I talked about how I was treated, I was told that the staff would be talked to.

I had to ask permission to walk down the hallways. If I did, I would soon be hollered at and asked what I was doing. For punishment for walking down the hallways, I was put into the corner. Past experiences had taught other people who lived there to cower in the back of the room. They would be silent and their faces would look blank. Not one of them would dare to defend me or they would find themselves punished. They were just scared. They were always scared.

Another thing that upset me was the punishment for getting out of bed. I was told to get back in bed and was then strapped to it. I felt that this was very unfair. This treatment hurt my stomach and left red marks. This hurt me a lot. I begged them to please stop! They shouldn't be allowed to do this. I tried to tell them but I was just ignored.

People kept pushing me around, "Go do this, go do that," and they would pull my hair. They did not take care and would just go ahead and do it anyway. The staff would often call me bad names and holler at me. They never felt that I could do anything right. I had no freedom. I never felt like they cared about me. They would go away and say that they did not want to hear about it.

I feel a lot of anger and frustration when I remember how they used to lock me up in a cage and leave me there. This was a punishment for doing something bad. Not knowing what to do and feeling sick, I stared at my surroundings. As my body slid to the floor, I could see nothing but darkness. What was going on outside? What would life be like if I wasn't in here? With my head on my knees, I would cry, trying to shut out a world that did not seem to care. I was so scared I could not move. I felt used and most of the time wrongly accused. People should not be allowed to do that. They shouldn't have left me there alone.

I was 15 years old when I left the institution, and I am glad to be out. I am **much** happier now as I do not have anyone but me telling me where to go and what to do. I can do it myself. What a good feeling just to be able to walk down the streets of St. Stephen. I am living in the real world now. I can just go for a walk if I feel like it. I can stop and talk to other people on the street. I really like the fresh air and the birds. They look so free. I never want to be locked up again.

Alene Steinbach is the co-author of the* Children's Service Review Project *of the New Brunswick Association for Community Living.

Adapted from* entourage, *Volume 6, Number 3, Summer 1991.

A Will to Learn:

The Experiences of a Self-Advocate in the Education System

BY MARCIA MARCACCIO

When I was five years old, I began attending a religious program for handicapped children. My sister, Donna, was a volunteer teacher in the class. I wanted to read. My sister said she would teach me. Our friend Lorraine gave Donna teaching supplies to help me read. Lorraine is a teacher.

In September I started Mounthaven School. This was a school for children who have a mental handicap. My brothers and sisters went to a different school. At Christmas time, my parents went to my school for interviews with my teachers. They told my teacher and my principal that my sister was teaching me to read. The principal and my teacher told my parents that Donna should not be teaching me to read. My parents believed the teacher and the principal. They told Donna and me to stop. My parents did this because they loved me and they didn't want me to have problems.

I was taught the same things as the other children in my class. I was taught different things from what my brothers and sisters were taught at their school. It made me feel miserable to be taught different things. It made me feel that I could not do things for myself. It made me frustrated. I felt bad about myself. I felt I was different from my brothers and sisters and friends and cousins.

Vincent Massey was a senior school program for students who were 16 years old to 21 years old. Every student was handicapped. When I went to Vincent Massey, I wanted to learn things that would help me get a job and be part of the community. I wanted to learn to read, write, do math, take care of children. I felt left out, frustrated and bored because I wasn't learning things.

When I went to school they didn't teach me to read. They taught me yoga and crafts. I was upset with the work training that I had to do. I had to go to a park in winter to paint picnic tables. I had to pack potatoes. Finally, I told my sister that I didn't want to do that anymore. It was cold at the park. The work was dirty. I had to come home dirty. I didn't like it. My sister talked to my parents and they told the teacher that I wasn't to do these things. My principal was mad at my sister. My brothers and sisters didn't have to do these things at their school. I didn't feel I was being respected.

I was bored at that school. I felt bad sometimes. I didn't really have any friends. I liked some of the kids I went to school with but I only saw them at school. I didn't do things with them on the weekend. We lived far from each other and we needed support to get together. My friends were my brothers and sisters and their friends and my relatives.

About 10 years ago, a friend of my family, Paul, said he would help me to read. He taught me to read words from the sports page of the newspaper. It was fun. When Paul was teaching me, I felt good about myself. I realized I could learn to read. I made a decision to do something about it. My teachers didn't support me. They told my sister that she was not being fair to me. They said I couldn't read. They were wrong.

If I could change the school I went to I would change the subjects. I wouldn't want crafts. I would want reading and writing. I had cooking classes but only watched the teacher. I would want to participate more. I would want to learn how to use the library. I would like to do projects with the other students to learn about things. I would want to learn about geography — about countries and how to use a map. I would like to learn spelling. I would like to learn other languages, especially Italian. I would like to learn math. I did like gym but would have liked to do team sports like basketball. I would like to have had recess so I could meet friends. I would have liked to get to know other students and to do things with them.

I wish I could have given my opinion about what I wanted to learn. I would have liked to have choices. I would want respect and to feel important. I would want to go to school with my brothers and sisters and to learn interesting things.

Into the workforce

Two and a half years after I graduated from Vincent Massey, I was hired as an Educational Assistant at the Separate School Board. There were many good things and there were some problems. The teachers would get upset with me because I did the wrong thing. I didn't know that it was wrong. I could not read the list of duties that the teachers gave me. I was embarrassed to tell them that I couldn't read. When they found out that I couldn't read they said I should not have my job. I did not feel good about myself. I felt that I was different from the other staff. People didn't always want to help me.

My sister and I talked about the situation. She asked me if I wanted to learn. I said I definitely wanted to learn. My parents, my brothers and my other sister weren't sure that it was necessary. Maybe it wasn't a good idea, they thought. They said if I needed reading skills for my job maybe I should quit my job. I thought, "No way!" We looked for a course but everyone said they didn't have a program for "special needs" students. Finally, the adult program at the Separate School Board said OK. I went to the adult literacy program sponsored by the Hamilton Catholic School Board Adult Education Program. I started in 1986 and continue to go for two half-days per week. Donna hired a tutor to give me extra support for a while. It was great. I was learning. I made a commitment to stay with it.

I love going to Sacred Heart. My teacher Barb and I have a routine. I make a sentence and I say it into a tape recorder. Barb then writes the sentence and we work on each new word. I make my own dictionary with my new words.

I'm doing so well that I now read in my church on Sundays. When my sister Patty got married I asked her if I could read at her wedding. At first she said no. A friend at church asked me to read on a special occasion. Another friend told my sister that I did a good job. After that she asked me to read at her wedding. My relatives said I did a good job.

I do not have many problems at work. I can read my duties. I can go to P.D. days and I can participate in what's going on because I can read some of the notes and I can write notes. I can now read books. I learn more now. I can be more independent because I can read signs in the community. I can help children to read. I feel good about myself because I can do it. I love learning to read. It increases my vocabulary and this helps me to express my feelings and my thoughts better. I am President of People First in Hamilton. I can now write my own agenda for the meetings and I can read letters from other groups that come to me. I read these letters to my group. There are words I don't know yet. I get stuck sometimes but people help me. I keep practising.

From* Changing Canadian Schools: Perspectives on Disability and Inclusion, *Gordon L. Porter and Diane Richler (eds.), North York, Ontario: The Roeher Institute, 1991.

Margaret Goes to School

BY CAROLYN AND JOCHEN EGGERT

Today is Margaret's first day of school. She is full of anticipation, looking forward to seeing all the children who went to kindergarten with her last year. Her backpack is filled with pencils, crayons and paper. Margaret finds the place for her boots marked by a tag with her name and in the Grade 1 classroom there is a desk with her name on it. She sits down and says good-bye to us, her parents.

This sounds like a normal first day at school. The difference is that the date is January 14, 1991, and not September 1990. On that day, Margaret's name was not called along with the names of the other children of her school when they were assembled into their new classes.

Margaret is developmentally delayed, and the school board of the County of Strathcona in Alberta, just east of Edmonton, had ruled that her needs could not be met in her neighbourhood school. In their opinion, Margaret would best be educated in a special education class in a school at the other end of town, reached only by a long bus ride.

Through the hierarchy

Early in December 1989, we had inquired with the principal of our neighbourhood school about Margaret attending Grade 1. After all, she was attending kindergarten at that time, and things had gone quite smoothly. The principal agreed but the decision was not up to him. In our county these decisions are made by a centralized administration. For us, this meant a journey through the various levels of the school administration hierarchy: first, the Supervisor of Special Education; second, the Director for Student Services; third, the Associate Superintendent for Instructional Services; and finally, the Superintendent. We were lucky that the Director for Student Services happened to be on vacation so we skipped one level. Meetings with each remaining administrator took place from mid-May to the end of June.

The administration offered no new arguments for their position; our reasons were not refuted; no reasons for the administrative decisions were offered; and yet, it took each official two to three weeks to come up with a response. The responses were always identical. In July, the Superintendent wrote us confirming the initial decision of his Special Education Supervisor. Margaret was not accepted into Grade 1 at the school. We had not moved an inch from square one.

The appeal

August was filled with intense preparation for the appeal hearing at the school board, scheduled for August 30. Integration Action Association of Alberta became instrumental in helping plan strategies and establish various supports. We had regular meetings with a support group in our home. Margaret always looked forward to these meetings because she loves parties and attention. She also began to understand what the fuss was really about. To our astonishment one day, she clearly said the word "integration". When we asked her for the meaning of such a big word, she replied, "Help me go to school."

On August 30, our group, including witnesses and experts, made a 90-minute presentation to 11 members of our 16-member school board. There was also a 25-minute presentation by the Superintendent representing the position against Margaret's acceptance. According to their rules the board had two weeks to make their decision; however, after only 75 minutes of deliberation they held the vote. Only one trustee dared to vote against the Superintendent.

After this defeat, 12 people of our support group met at our home to discuss how to proceed. There was a lengthy phone call with Dulcie McCallum, a Victoria, B.C., lawyer who had been involved earlier. By noon the next day, we had completed a five-page letter to Education Minister Jim Dinning appealing the board's decision according to the *Alberta School Act*. This letter was in the Minister's office by 3 p.m. August 31, less than 24 hours after the board's vote. This was just before the Labour Day weekend; school was starting on September 4. We tried to get at least an interim ruling to let Margaret attend school pending the outcome of the appeal. We even called Mr. Dinning at his home on Sunday afternoon, but he said he could not do anything immediately.

Maintaining contact

On the first day of school we went to the assembly. Margaret's name was of course not called, but we were assured by the principal that Margaret would be welcome in his school should the decision be reversed. Meanwhile, we refused to send Margaret to the school which the county wanted her to attend.

Two important things had to be looked after immediately: Margaret's academic instruction and getting her as close to our school as possible and in touch with the children there. This was time consuming and stressful as we tried to carry on a normal life. Instruction was provided by private tutors. By early November it was clear that Margaret would not go to school before Christmas, so we coordinated a meeting between her three tutors and a Grade 1 teacher to keep her tutoring in line with the Grade 1 curriculum. Unfortunately, we could not provide enough tutoring for her — only four to eight hours per week.

It was difficult to get Margaret close to our school. The administration refused to allow her to attend any classes there. We enrolled her in Brownies so she could be in contact with children from the school. We also used every excuse to take her into the school, for parent-teacher interviews for our other children, for meetings, for the Christmas program, including the dress rehearsal, for the skating party and other social events. All this kept her familiar with the environment and in contact with the other children. For many hours of these days, however, Margaret sat staring out the window and waiting for her siblings to come home from school, when she would tell us that she wanted to go there too.

High profile investigation

As we carried on our efforts, Jim Dinning, the Minister of Education, assembled a high profile committee to investigate our case and to report back to him with a recommendation. The committee was headed by the former president of the University of Alberta, Myer Horowitz. A greater eminence can't be found in educational circles in Alberta. We inundated the committee with over 500 pages of submissions written by legal and educational experts, and by parents of successfully integrated children. On top of that, there was a complaint filed with the Alberta Human Rights Commission, suggesting that the county was illegally discriminating against Margaret based on a recent amendment to the Alberta *Individuals' Rights Protection Act* protecting people from discrimination because of a mental disability.

The minister's procedure lasted for five weeks and was stressful and expensive. The committee visited us at home, observed Margaret at her Brownies meeting, went to our school and visited the school of the county's choice.

On November 19, the committee held its final event — a meeting between the three parties. By now the procedure had become so political that we had difficulty connecting it with the original issue. The meeting was tense and nerve-wracking. We faced *the* Myer Horowitz, a child psychologist from Calgary and a senior official of the Edmonton regional Education Office. The county was represented by the Superintendent and the chairman of our Board of Education, one of their administrators and a lawyer of the Alberta Trustees Association. Our party included advocate Bruce Uditsky and a lawyer working on our behalf. Also present was a lawyer of the Attorney General's office.

At times I stopped and tried to fit Margaret into the context of the proceedings. What was at stake for these high profile people? Who really cared about the impact this meeting could have on the course of Margaret's life? The meeting was so far removed from the normal experience of human communication, so strange in its formality, that the pressure seemed to squeeze Margaret right out of it.

However hostile the circumstances appeared, we must have made a convincing impression on the members of the minister's committee! One month later a courier delivered a letter with the minister's decision. He took an uncompromising position, stating that the Board of Education decision was not appropriate. He supported all the recommendations of his committee, which included measures to integrate Margaret into her neighbourhood school.

Margaret clearly knew what the letter meant. Our house rocked from her reaction to the good news, and she has been a different child since.

Our year-long struggle is not forgotten, but the members of the administration are reacting professionally and not exhibiting bad feelings if they exist. Nonetheless, it is obvious to us that we have to stay alert. While we hear encouraging opinions from the board, we also read about board members who have not changed their views.

And the larger issue is also unresolved. Do all parents with the same plans for their children have to go through this struggle? Can school officials continue to push their opinions through boards without backing them up with evidence or experience? Is discrimination something children with handicaps have to learn to live with? We had one story which ended happily, but we may face similar struggles as we fight for other rights in our child's life.

From* entourage, *Volume 6, Number 3, Summer 1991.

A Real Home

BY PETER PARK

I lived for my first 20 years at home in a house with my family in a regular community. I *existed* for the next 18 years in an institution, where everything was done for you. After that I lived in a large group home with 16 other people in Ingersoll, Ontario. I moved to a smaller group home of 10 unrelated people in Brantford, Ontario. I then went on to an association-run apartment program, where I lived with two other fellows not of my choosing. I hunted for and found a place of my own.

When I was in the group home my Family Benefits Allowance or Social Assistance cheque was $403. It went to the Association. I was given a very small amount of money, about $10 per month. The rest went for rent, bills, food, general maintenance and clothes, or you could let it accumulate. You had to spend the money to stay on Family Benefits Allowance or Social Assistance. That meant keeping the bank balance under a specified amount.

Well, when I got my own pad, my cheque went down as I was living in the community. I had to come up with things like first and last months' rent plus pay the Association for moving me and my things. I had very little of my own furniture. I immediately said, "Hey. I need a kitchen table, bed and bureau." Fortunately for me I owned a bed and my dresser but I had to get a kitchen table right away. I owned a hammer, a screwdriver and a pair of pliers and I had some determination. I went to garage sales and flea markets and I picked up a much needed table for $8.03. It needed a lot of work but I was willing to spend the time.

I found my cheque went down fast. The rent took most of my money; the rent goes up and the cheque goes down. I bought pots and pans, knives and forks at garage sales. Some people are required to buy their own fridge and stove. At this time I was attending the sheltered workshop. Occasionally they would have something donated to them, like an old chair and I could afford to buy it over time (the cost was deducted from my paycheque). In a workshop my paycheque was $20 every two weeks. This all happened when the prices were lower in 1980.

People who live in group homes are given a false sense of security because these places have fancy dishes, the furniture is very nice but not practical for most people, the curtains are luxurious, the food is better than in institutions and often better than a lot of folks in the community have. But do you think this is normal?

You say these are real homes. A real home in my opinion is a house or apartment in the community with your peers. A group home or institution or apartment program run by an association is not a real home. You say a group home is in the community. I agree but do you have friends of your choosing? Are you encouraged to meet your next door neighbour? Can you call your next door neighbour by name? Do you live a life of segregation? Do you have to buy second hand clothes or furniture? The list goes on.

Often people end up in boarding homes where they have a room but no privacy. Their cheque was reduced when they left the group home or association by at least $100. I am not sure of the amount. Group homes and associations have a higher rate. Boarding homes have no rules, no fire escapes and so on because the owner wants the money collected in rent; therefore, poor health conditions exist.

People who have been labelled or folks who are poor are forced to exist in ghettos or groups of low income housing where they're segregated by society. The fact that you don't have the money means that you are forced to buy cheaper food and other goods. Although we encourage people to apply for government-funded housing, we should look at other options.

In today's society people often have no choice. Most people with money spend it ridiculously on things that are not necessary, when these dollars could be spent on improving housing in general.

A real home is a place of your own choosing and not someone else's. Decisions are made together with others, for example, your spouse. A real home also includes the community, community resources, labelled and non-labelled people and other people you wish to be part of your immediate community.

When people move to something that is not funded by government they are required to pay their own medical expenses monthly. The drug card is no longer in place. My drugs for epilepsy cost me a pretty penny each month. Things like that are deterrents to moving to a real home of your own. Moving in any light is costly but I think it means more cost to less fortunate people who are already poor.

Peter Park is a self-advocate and Coordinator of National People First, as well as co-founder of People First of Ontario.

From **entourage** *Volume 6, Number 1, Winter 1991.*

What Does It Mean to Be Labelled and Poor?

Alice Patterson is 32 years old. She lives with her four-year-old son, Sean, and her companion. Alice earns no income and is no longer eligible for social assistance because her partner has a job.

Alice lives in a subsidized two-bedroom apartment in downtown Toronto that costs her $220 a month. The walls are mostly bare. Her furniture is sufficient but sparse. She does not smoke and rarely spends money on alcohol. In addition to rent, she pays a monthly hydro bill ($86), a telephone bill, and must have enough money left over to cover her son's day care and food and clothes for the family. This does not include other necessary but costly items such as sheets for the bed or pots for the kitchen, not to mention the little pleasures we all seek in a rare movie or outing.

Alice has lived independently for approximately 10 years. She has worked in many different jobs, in a hospital laundry room, in a canteen, as a cashier in a garage, at a group home cafeteria and most recently inserting advertisement pamphlets into the *Toronto Sun*. She has also learned the importance of education. She quit school after Grade 8, but has recently completed a number of correspondence courses in math and family studies through Beat the Street, an adult basic literacy program in Toronto. She is a responsible parent, ensuring her son has balanced meals and warm clothes to wear.

Without the benefits of education or training, however, Alice has had a difficult time keeping a job. In addition to this, she has to live with the burden of being labelled mentally handicapped. The label makes many employers think she is unable to work or does not deserve a job. At times in the past, she was forced to attend a sheltered workshop, where she earned around 35 cents an hour doing menial jobs. She has also received the Ontario Family Benefits Allowance. But the government requires beneficiaries of the pension to be labelled permanently unemployable, which made it impossible for her to seek work.

Between jobs, Alice has had to rely on welfare as her primary means of financial support. While she still received it, her monthly welfare cheques amounted to approximately $600, barely enough to cover rent, bills and food. But she managed. Now she is forced from one dependency (on the government) to another (on her partner).

Many people with mental handicaps have been raised in institutional settings and are not taught the skills necessary to deal with the system, let alone daily concerns. Few manage to live on the little money they have and often become very mobile, which makes it hard for social workers to give continuous support. The relationships of people with any kind of disability are subjected to tremendous amounts of stress and often the only personal support available to a person with a mental handicap is ended through separation.

Alice is no exception. As a child, she spent many years going from foster home to foster home, and she has lived in several institutions. Her father is no longer living. Her mother, from whom she is now estranged, was herself at one time placed in an institution. Alice has virtually no contact with her siblings. Because of poverty and the many difficulties she faces in life, she is very vulnerable. She simply does not have the supports or network of friends and family that we all depend on in difficult times.

Despite the many obstacles, Alice has been able to construct a life for herself. She has her own home, a son, a partner. She is President of the downtown People First Group. She is outspoken and has a dynamic personality. She has determination and is highly motivated, two qualities that are rare in people who find themselves unable to provide for themselves or their family. She is very creative and enjoys drama and writing.

Alice has turned her creative energy to raising her son and building her own life. Her goal for the future is to become a day care assistant. She has enrolled in a co-op program that provides day care training both in the classroom and on the job. Once she begins the course, she will also qualify for an Employment Canada training allowance and her hopes are high that she will get a job when she receives her qualification.

Alice has overcome a great deal to achieve the things she has. But because of her label she is at constant risk of losing her child or being sent back to an institution. Her determination not to give up on her life serves to remind us of our role in helping her along the way.

From* entourage, *Volume 4, number 3, Spring 1989.

A Family Love Story

Brad read when it was important to him. When the list of subjects for the forthcoming year was circulated Brad scanned the choices. He was thrilled to discover Dance among the subjects and with dogged determination brought the paper home to show us. If enough students were interested the class would be offered in the fall. He hoped all summer there would be enough students to constitute the required group. To his joy in September 1990 he would take part in the dance class.

It consisted mainly of lively, agile girls. Brad and his coach did the warmups and as much of the class activities as possible, then Brad worked on his own interpretative dance with his own music.

When the December concert was being planned Brad was told he could prepare and present a number. The drama, dance and music departments were combining forces to produce the concert. When I asked Brad to show me at home what he intended to do for the concert I was dumbfounded. Totally amazed by his ability to express through movement, I was overcome with emotion as, in the privacy of our living room, he shared a poignant message: You Needed Me.

In the light of his performance I was concerned that he stay focused and totally on track; that he did not get confused or fragmented by the activities and high energy of the other students. Thus, I took the liberty of being his coach. He recited some of his poetry about Christmas and then danced his interpretation of You Needed Me. The audience was very receptive to Brad's presentation and he received warm applause. We were encouraged by the community feedback and the appreciation they expressed. They had been touched by Brad's open expression.

On the last afternoon before Christmas holidays an assembly was held in the gymnasium. It was a time of great jollity and high spirits with the anticipated festive season. Community entertainers were present and the energy level was explosive. I was concerned to know how appropriately Brad's work would be presented and received so I slipped into the crowd as inconspicuously as possible. When Brad's number was announced the student body was hushed. Two girls whom I didn't know were sitting behind me. One nudged the other and whispered, "Be quiet! Listen. This is really sad."

Dressed in his tails, his favourite outfit for dancing, Brad knelt on the floor, hands up, head turned to one side. His expression was serious, reflecting total concentration. There was the familiar introduction and then Ann Murray's voice, "I cried a tear. You wiped it dry ..." Yes, it was sad and the students were listening intently. Without a doubt Brad was telling them with dance and music what he could not say in words. "I was confused. You cleared my mind ... When I was lost you took me home ... You even called me a friend ... Somehow you needed me." Not even the most insensitive could miss the message of that performance. He had done it just as he planned. Without falter or hesitation he bowed, acknowledging the students' applause and cheers of appreciation.

I slipped out and returned home. I felt somewhat disbelieving and at the same time a little mystified. How was it that Brad had received so much respect? Why were the students so attentive? I really didn't understand.

From* A Family Love Story, *written and published by the Magnus Family, Ganges, British Columbia, 1995.

Chapter VI.

Barriers to participation

For most adults with an intellectual disability, the obstacles to literacy remain insurmountable. A number of barriers have been identified and fall into three categories:

1. Policy and program barriers
2. Barriers to learning
3. Attitudinal barriers

1. Policy and program barriers

How governments design and deliver literacy policy and programs often works against the participation of people with an intellectual disability. The following are certain policy and program barriers affecting their access to literacy education (these issues are discussed in more detail in the Guide for Program Managers and Coordinators):

- Funding is needed to cover the costs of program coordinators, educators (where volunteer tutors are not used), educational materials and overhead. But there is a widely acknowledged lack of resources for literacy education. Inadequate funding acts as a barrier to access both for adults with an intellectual disability and other adults. Underfunded programs result in long waiting lists, an insufficient number of paid coordinators and the inadequate provision of supports to tutors and educators.

- The various vocational and educational programs for adults with an intellectual disability usually fail to provide opportunities for literacy education. Some instruction in reading and writing may be included in these programs but is usually not the primary focus.

- Although some literacy programs are free, many adult basic education or academic upgrading programs involve a fee. Even when there is no fee, many people are unable to afford the costs of transportation, attendant care or other personal supports they may require in order to attend the program.

- Funding for attendant care that a person may need to participate in a literacy program is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain.
- Adults who require transportation to participate in literacy education encounter a number of difficulties. Specialized transit buses and vans for those with a mobility impairment often require bookings far in advance and can be difficult to arrange.
- Those who require wheelchairs and other equipment or communication assistive devices face further barriers to participation in literacy education. Programs may be inaccessible to people with a physical disability, both because of physical barriers and because of reluctance on the part of coordinators and educators to provide assistance with basic physical activities.

2. Attitudinal barriers

Many individuals find that, once they are labelled, their capacity to learn at all is questioned. One mother relates how her daughter wanted to gain access to a community literacy program:

> Brenda wanted to do some more work on her reading and writing. When she was originally at school, the teachers were very good and Brenda began to read and write. So I heard about a community program for literacy for adults and gave them a call. They gave me information about the program, it sounded fine, so we agreed to meet. Well, when we arrived and sat down, they said that she has "Down's". They said then that it simply wasn't possible. She wouldn't be able to attend the program.

Another woman recounted:

> I lived in an institution for 14 years. If you've never gone to school you were never taught how to read and write. The doctors in the institution thought I could never learn. They never gave me the opportunity. They never gave me the chance. Sometimes professionals criticize too much. I said to myself, "If you're going to be independent you're going to have to learn to read and write." It's an awful thing when you're forgotten.

Attitudes and beliefs held by program managers, service providers, educators and tutors can limit access to literacy education. Attitudes and beliefs that make it more difficult for people to join literacy programs include:

- The belief that learners with an intellectual disability cannot adequately learn or develop literacy skills.
- The assumption that adults with an intellectual disability will not be able to keep up with the pace of basic education in academic upgrading courses.

- An assumption that the problem lies with the individual, who is seen as incapable of learning, rather than in the structure of the income support system or the literacy program that does not accommodate the needs of the individual. For example, the process of learning literacy skills often proceeds at a much slower pace for adults with an intellectual disability than for other adults. As a result, adults who require training allowances to meet their living costs while in literacy-related education may require more time in the program than the training allowance permits. In addition, the literacy program itself may have time limits that are insufficient for the learning needs of adults with an intellectual disability.

- The assumption that the majority of adults with an intellectual disability will not learn beyond a Grade 3 or 4 academic level. Investment in academic upgrading beyond this level is often questioned by those in decision-making positions.

- The assumption that even if individuals do make some advances in their levels of reading and writing, these advances will not be sufficient to make a difference to employment opportunities. Those who make decisions about allocating scarce dollars for vocational and employment-related training may, therefore, be reluctant to recommend literacy education as an option.

- The belief that an adult with an intellectual disability stigmatizes the literacy program.

3. Barriers to learning

The barriers to realizing a learner-centred approach to instruction and education for adults with an intellectual disability are related to:

- training of tutors and educators;
- materials;
- links;
- modes of instruction.

☐ Training of tutors and educators

As tutors and educators, you may be uncertain how to assist an adult with an intellectual disability in developing his or her literacy skills. You may lack confidence in your abilities and may assume that people with an intellectual disability are not able to develop literacy skills. You may be fearful of working with adults who have been labelled.

Yet those who have worked closely with adults with an intellectual disability in literacy education have indicated that these learners do not need to be streamed into special programs and that highly specialized educators are not required. Although they may be among the most challenging participants in a literacy program, all adults who have low levels of literacy skills have "special needs".

Although specialized educators are not required, it helps to identify some of the issues that literacy tutors and educators may encounter in working with this group of learners, issues that should be addressed and discussed in tutor training:

- ☐ a learning process that is slow in comparison to other adults;
- ☐ the lack of experience people may have articulating, or developing, a set of learning goals;
- ☐ cognitive challenges to learning that may be encountered to a greater degree than with other adults;
- ☐ behaviours that may seem unusual to tutors;
- ☐ non-verbal communication or the use of communication aids or assistive devices;
- ☐ the need for assistance with eating or using the washroom;
- ☐ the effects of medication on behaviour and cognition;
- ☐ establishing boundaries with respect to a learner's personal problems; whether and to what extent literacy educators and tutors should become involved in personal advocacy for adult learners;
- ☐ measuring success beyond the confines of the literacy program;
- ☐ fostering an atmosphere that is tolerant of differences.

If these issues are not addressed in initial tutor training, tutors and educators should discuss them with program managers and coordinators for inclusion in future training initiatives.

Materials

Another issue is the need for materials written in plain and accessible language that are informative. For example, materials are needed that provide information about using the health care system, applying for various forms of income support, appealing decisions of government officials on benefits, allowances and social assistance, rights and responsibilities in contractual arrangements and using the legal aid system.

In addition, materials are needed that give expression to the experiences of adults with an intellectual disability. One of the biggest challenges to adults who are beginning to read is finding meaning in written material. Some literacy programs encourage adult learners to begin their literacy education with their own stories. Some programs provide facilities for publishing learners' work, which validates the learner's experiences and makes the work available to other learners. There is room for further development in this direction.

Links

Fostering links among literacy programs and other aspects of an adult's life has been identified as an important factor in maximizing the learning for adults with an intellectual disability. Where an adult learner agrees, it can be advantageous to work with that person's support workers, family members, co-workers or others involved in the person's life. This allows these others, through an exchange of methods and strategies, to support the literacy learning process at home, at work or elsewhere.

Modes of instruction

In a recent study on literacy, it was suggested that adults with an intellectual disability tend to have more difficulty in literacy programs that are exclusively classroom-based.[16] In addition, they learn more effectively and quickly with one-to-one support. However, literacy and basic education programs delivered by school boards and community colleges do not usually provide one-to-one support. As a result, adults with an intellectual disability have often been refused on the grounds that they are unlikely to benefit from exclusively classroom-based instruction. There is a need for programs to respond to individual learning styles.

Chapter VII.

Strategies for tutors and educators

Tutors and educators delivering inclusive literacy have identified a number of strategies for:

1. Instruction;
2. Building advocacy and links;
3. Dealing with support staff and family members.

1. Instructional strategies

Many strategies are used in teaching reading, writing and numeracy to help people achieve their learning goals. There is no single, universally effective method. Whatever works for an individual learner becomes an effective method. Tutors describe strategies they have found successful:

☐ Language experience writing

"I have found the most successful strategy is when students dictate their ideas to their tutors and then learn to read these stories, first with assistance and then alone. Once they realize their stories are worth writing about, there's a flood. Sometimes they need help getting ideas out. Sometimes their first sentences contain only two words."

☐ Stories and other reading material on topics compatible with a student's interest

"Five people who joined our literacy program lived in an institution when they were children. They have memories of being unhappy and uncared for and wanted others to know what it was like to grow up in an institution in the 1950s and '60s. They formed the oral history group. Some group members told their stories while others took on the jobs of interviewers, photographers, actors, artists and editors."

☐ **Computer-assisted literacy**
"I have found the computer has been a tremendous help in its capacity for repetition, which far exceeds what I can give. However, a computer cannot give adequate encouragement and recognition when the student needs a boost to his morale. I, as his tutor, can also take what he is learning at the CAL (computer-assisted literacy) and apply these skills to his daily living experiences. I have noted a great improvement in his communication skills and self-confidence, in addition to his reading skills."

☐ **Using materials appropriate for the learner's goals**
"These might include recipes, manuals, charts or graphs from the actual job or living situation. Bringing materials to the tutorial or class is an effective way of involving the learner."

☐ **Making collages out of magazines**
"This can be a good way of introducing topics for discussion and finding out the person's interests."

☐ **Having a large array of materials to work from**
"It may be important to have a lot of materials of the same type to work with. The person may require repetition to learn and remember. It is helpful to develop a rich collection of resources to maintain the learner's interest."

☐ **Collecting people's stories and putting them in a binder**
"Having other learners' stories to read can be a very useful resource. Collect the stories in a binder and organize them by level. The learner-generated material then becomes available to the other learners in the program."

☐ **Assisted or paired reading from accessible books and taped books**
"In looking for appropriate materials, I find the most useful books might have only two to four sentences on each page and a picture to give the student a clear idea of what the story is about. A tutor or another member of the group may provide assistance; students like to teach one another."

☐ **Stimulating discussion by doing things outside the classroom**
"Some learners may have had a limited life experience. Talking about their life experiences might be difficult. I sometimes find it useful to stimulate discussion by going for a walk or doing something together outside the classroom."

☐ **Group work**
"Working in a group situation, use the blackboard to compose letter collectively about a situation or subject that concerns all the learners."

2. Building advocacy and links

Because of limited employment, recreation and other opportunities for people with an intellectual disability in the community, when they do gain access to a literacy program, they may be reluctant to leave. There may be no other place to go. In addition, they may feel that once they leave a program, they cannot return later. The lack of options places an enormous burden of responsibility on literacy programs that welcome people with an intellectual disability.

Links between literacy programs and other education, training and employment opportunities are, therefore, critical. Adults usually need support and assistance to move beyond literacy education to other learning opportunities. The barriers they confront when seeking further education, training or employment opportunities may be equally challenging.

Tutors can play an important role in:

☐ advocating in the community for accessibility to all literacy programs;

☐ identifying advocacy organizations in the community;

☐ identifying educational, training and recreational activities in the community that match the learners' interests;

☐ assisting the learner to identify employment opportunities.

3. Dealing with support staff and family members

A learner may attend a literacy program accompanied by a care-giver — a family member or a paid care-giver. This can have a positive or a negative effect depending on why the care-giver is there and the attitude toward, and relationship they have with, the learner.

In most instances, the care-giver will play a positive and supportive role. He or she may be able to support and reinforce the skills developed through literacy education.

On the other hand, the presence of a care-giver may have a negative impact on the learner. If he or she tends to treat the learner like a child — answering on her or his behalf, for example — his or her presence can lower a learner's self-esteem and could be an obstacle to learning. The care-giver may also have an impact on how the learner relates to other people in the literacy program and how they are regarded by others. If a tutor finds that a learner's care-giver is interfering with learning there are a number of things that can be done:

☐ ask the learner what role they would like the care-giver to play and whether their presence is necessary during the lessons; perhaps the caregiver can be in another room during the lesson and be called upon only if needed;

☐ discuss with both the learner and care-giver the meaning of learner-centred literacy; this may need to be repeated on several occasions if the support person begins to try to play a more directive role;

☐ ensure that interactions with the learner are not mediated by the care-giver; the care-giver is there only to provide support or assistance when necessary;

☐ discuss the problem with other tutors and the program manager or coordinator; they may have had similar experiences and have suggestions about handling the situation.

Chapter VIII.

Components of successful programs:

A checklist

The components of inclusive programs and "best practices" for inclusive learner-centred literacy are instructive. Think about how the factors discussed below correspond to what happens in the literacy program in which you are involved. If much of what is outlined here reflects what happens in your program, you may already be working in an environment that fosters inclusion. If not, think about what changes need to be made — both to the methods of instruction you employ as a tutor and to the program generally. Discuss these issues with learners, other tutors and the program manager or coordinator.

Inclusive literacy involves:

☐ individualized methods of instruction and the use of appropriate resources;

☐ supportive instructors and tutors;

☐ opportunities for tutor training and tutor support;

☐ inclusive eligibility criteria and assessments;

☐ provision of supports to increase accessibility;

☐ flexible approaches to evaluation;

☐ outreach and linking;

☐ strong leadership.

A checklist for inclusive learner-centred programs

Consider how your program incorporates these elements:

- ☐ **Individualized methods of instruction and the use of resources:**
  - ☐ based on the individual goals of the learner;
  - ☐ involving the active participation of the learner in choosing materials and methods;
  - ☐ adapted to the learner's own experiences, age and skills.
- ☐ **Supportive instructors and tutors who:**
  - ☐ demonstrate competence and confidence that they can build literacy skills and believe firmly in the learner's ability to learn;
  - ☐ appreciate the obstacles overcome by people with disabilities in getting to the program and avoid prejudicial attitudes and experiences;
  - ☐ foster an inclusive and tolerant environment for people regardless of their differences;
  - ☐ encourage learners to choose what interests them and what skills they would like to develop further;
  - ☐ draw on learners' life experiences as learning tools;
  - ☐ recognize the connection between providing literacy education and providing people with a means of personal empowerment and tools for social change.

- ☐ **Effective tutor training and tutor support that:**
  - ☐ provide tutors with opportunities for ongoing training and with materials to ensure the best possible instruction for learners;
  - ☐ focus on promoting positive tutor attitudes regarding the abilities of people with disabilities;
  - ☐ combine pre-service workshops and regular meetings that provide opportunities to discuss a range of instructional issues. These might address materials, resources, methods, behaviour parameters, lesson structures and content and measures of success;
  - ☐ include sensitivity training in which prospective tutors hear from students. Learners' writings are read aloud. There is time for questions and answers, where tutors gain insight into learners' experiences as a result of having been labelled;
  - ☐ provide tutors with an opportunity to identify and discuss issues related to the role of care-givers (paid or unpaid) supporting people with an intellectual disability attending literacy education;
  - ☐ assist tutors in identifying the progress made by their students both within and outside the literacy program.
- ☐ **Inclusive eligibility criteria and assessments that:**
  - ☐ are broad enough so that anyone with difficulties reading and writing is eligible;
  - ☐ do not screen people out based on their reading or writing abilities;
  - ☐ determine a person's skill level and provide information to select a suitable tutor, but are not used to establish ineligibility;
  - ☐ involve informal discussions, learning the person's history and observing their performance — rather than formal assessments which might be intimidating.

- **The provision of supports to increase accessibility, including:**
    - architectural accessibility;
    - acknowledgement of the difficulties people may have in their lives and recognition that a support person may not be able to solve these problems but can offer advice, support and friendship;
    - child care, counselling services and extra support for people with intellectual disabilities;
    - programs offered in the day and evening to encourage participation;
    - communication or assistive devices;
    - personal supports including emotional and motivational support, assistance during mealtimes, assistance using the washroom or turning the pages of a book.
- **Flexible approaches to evaluation:**
    - funding sources that do not judge success according to external criteria such as employability or standardized testing;
    - programming that fosters student responsibility for their own learning. Given that people with an intellectual disability have often been socialized to depend on others, it can be a challenge to reach the point where students direct their own learning;
    - programming that supports students to change their concept of reading and writing, such as less attention to the mechanical aspects of speaking correctly or printing neatly and focusing instead on comprehension;
    - identification of signs of success in many aspects of a person's life, beyond the classroom.

- ☐ **Outreach and linking, including:**
  - ☐ reaching out to provide information to prospective learners in the community;
  - ☐ reaching out to invite other literacy programs to be more inclusive. No single program should be the sole option for people with disabilities;
  - ☐ targeting institutional settings where people with intellectual disabilities are still residents;
  - ☐ gathering information on support services such as attendant care, personal support services, assistive devices and transportation; linking students to other areas of opportunity such as multicultural agencies, job opportunities, work training or unemployment insurance.

- ☐ **Strong leadership involving program directors and coordinators who:**
  - ☐ believe in every student's potential and accept people with disabilities on equal terms with other learners;
  - ☐ firmly believe that people with intellectual disabilities can learn. This message is communicated to both tutors and students in words and action;
  - ☐ recognize the importance of providing initial training as well as moral and practical support to tutors until relationships with students are well established;
  - ☐ are willing to take a hands-on approach to tutoring. For example, when difficulties arise — a student arrives late or not at all, a tutor shows signs of frustration — they are prepared to intervene. This might mean phoning to see if a student is ill, organizing meetings with support networks, changing schedules or contacting outside agencies;
  - ☐ take on an advocacy role, working for literacy policies and the availability of resources that support equal access and full participation;
  - ☐ ensure that the support for inclusiveness is generalized throughout the program and not championed by only one or two individuals.

Chapter IX.

Using this guide for training

This guide can be used by individual tutors and literacy educators or it can be a resource for tutor training. As part of a tutor training program, the material can be integrated into the existing program or delivered as a stand-alone unit dealing specifically with issues pertaining to people with an intellectual disability.

It is recommended that training include resource people who have an understanding of the many issues involved:

☐ learners;
☐ experienced tutors;
☐ advocates from organizations such as People First;
☐ support staff and service providers;
☐ program managers who have successfully integrated people with disabilities in their programs

The following themes should be included in the training:

1. Background information

Readings: The Paul Young Story, p. 8
The effects of exclusion from the mainstream, p. 13
A Will to Learn: The Experiences of a Self-Advocate in the Education System, p. 25
What Does It Mean to Be Labelled and Poor? p. 33

For discussion:

What are some of the issues in the lives of people with an intellectual disability presented in this material? What are other issues not discussed here?

Why is it important to understand the ways a person who has been labelled intellectually disabled may have been excluded from participation in community life?

Why is access to literacy education a human rights issue?

2. Attitudes and beliefs

Readings: What do we mean by people with an intellectual disability? p. 5

The Closing of an Institution: Life in the William F. Roberts, p. 23

Margaret Goes to School, p. 28

A Real Home, p. 31

Shattering the Myths, p. 10

For discussion:

What are the issues in using labels to describe people?

Identify some labels used to describe people with an intellectual disability. What images do they bring to mind? How do these compare with people you know?

Name some myths about people with an intellectual disability.

Outline strategies for dealing with intolerant attitudes expressed by learners or other tutors towards people with disabilities (or other minority groups).

3. Measuring and defining literacy and approaches to literacy education

Readings: Defining literacy, p. 7

A Family Love Story, p. 35

What do we know about the literacy levels of people with an intellectual disability? p. 11

For discussion:

Literacy levels have been measured by grade levels of the population and more recently by functional level. Why may it be more accurate to look at people's functional level rather than grade level?

What are some skills needed for literacy today that were not needed 50 years ago?

Why is it important to have a learner-centred approach to literacy education? What is the difference between this approach and more traditional approaches to education?

4. Methodology

Readings: Modes of instruction (under Barriers to participation), p. 41

Instructional strategies, p. 43

Training of tutors and educators, p. 40

For discussion:

There is no single method for working effectively with learners. Discuss why much depends upon the individual's interests, learning style and learning goals, as well as the skills they have already mastered.

To make access to literacy education universal, what accommodations might be required to meet individual needs?

What are some strategies for accommodating a person who:

- ☐ is trying out a program for the first time but believes they cannot learn new things?
- ☐ has difficulty stating their learning goals?
- ☐ has a short attention span or is easily distracted?
- ☐ needs a great deal of repetition to learn new skills?
- ☐ is dealing with issues in their life that are interfering with their ability to concentrate?

5. Advocacy and linking

Readings: Policy and program barriers, p. 37

Links (under Barriers to participation), p. 41

Building advocacy and links, p. 45

Dealing with support staff and family members, p. 45

For discussion:

- ☐ What are the barriers to access in your literacy program? How can you as a tutor or educator play a role in improving accessibility?
- ☐ How have literacy skills helped you to participate more fully in society and exercise your rights as a citizen?
- ☐ Tutors and educators can help people advocate for themselves with newly formed literacy skills. Give examples of how this might happen.
- ☐ How can you begin to find out what other options are available for people in the community, such as educational, training, recreation or other literacy programs?

Notes

1. In the 1991 Health and Activity Limitation Survey conducted by Statistics Canada, 4.2 million Canadians — 15.5 per cent of the population — reported some level of disability.
2. Louise Miller, **Illiteracy and Human Rights,** Ottawa: National Literacy Secretariat, 1990.
3. World Literacy of Canada, **Learning about Literacy**, 1993.
4. E. Gaber-Katz and G.M. Watson, **The Land that We Dream Of: A participatory study of community-based literacy,** Toronto: Research in Education Series, OISE Press/The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1991.
5. World Literacy of Canada, 1993 (see n. 3).
6. For a more complete discussion of this issue, see The Roeher Institute, **Literacy and Labels: A look at literacy policy and people with a mental handicap,** North York, Ontario: Author, 1989.
7. Statistics Canada, **Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities**, Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1990.
8. User defined cross-tabulation of Statistics Canada, **Health and Activity Limitation Survey,** Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1986.
9. *Ibid.*
10. From The Roeher Institute, **On Target? Canada's Employment-Related Programs for Persons with Disabilities**, North York, Ontario: Author, 1992.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Statistics Canada, 1986 (see n. 8).
13. Canadian Public Health Association, "National Literacy and Health Program" Presentation, N.d.
14. For a full discussion of the issues of violence and abuse against people with disabilities, see The Roeher Institute, **Harm's Way: The many faces of violence and abuse against persons with disabilities**, North York, Ontario: Author, 1995.
15. Gaber-Katz and Watson, 1991 (see n. 4).
16. The Roeher Institute, **Literacy and Labels,** 1990 (see n. 6).

Resources

Handbooks and guides

Butler, Shelley. **Learning about Literacy and Disability.** Toronto: St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program, 1990.

Centre for Independent Living in Toronto (CILT), Inc. **The Literacy Book: Options for teaching literacy to people with disabilities.** Toronto: CILT, 1991.

Dolman, Leslie and Debra Beattie-Kelly. **Making Your Literacy Program Accessible: A guide for practitioners.** Toronto: D.A.D.A. (Designing Aids for Disabled Adults), 1991.

Parkins, Sherri. **Accessibility and Beyond: Accessibility issues for Adult Basic Literacy Programs.** North York, Ontario: North York Board of Education, 1992.

The Roeher Institute. **Literacy in Motion: A guide to inclusive literacy education.** North York, Ontario: Author, 1994.

Rogers, Julia. **Am I Welcome Here? A book about literacy and psychiatric experiences.** Toronto: St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program, 1991.

Sanders, Maureen. **Meeting Challenges: A literacy project for adults with developmental disabilities.** Edmonton: Prospects Adult Literacy Association, 1991.

The Scottish Community Education Council. **Moving Ahead: A new handbook for tutors helping mentally handicapped adults to learn.** Edinburgh: Author, N.d.

Sutcliffe, Jeannie. **Teaching Basic Skills to Adults with Learning Difficulties.** London, England: The National Organisation for Adult Learning/The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, 1994.

Policy and research

Gaber-Katz, Elaine and Gladys M. Watson. **The Land that We Dream Of ... A participatory study of community-based literacy.** Toronto: Research in Education Series, OISE Press/The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1991.

Jones, Stan. **Survey of Adult Literacy in Ontario.** Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, Ministry of Education, 1992.

Miller, Louise. **Illiteracy and Human Rights.** Ottawa: National Literacy Secretariat, 1990.

The Roeher Institute. **Changing Canadian Schools: Perspectives on disability and inclusion.** North York, Ontario: Author, 1991.

The Roeher Institute. **Harm's Way: The many faces of violence and abuse against persons with disabilities.** North York, Ontario: Author, 1995.

The Roeher Institute. **Literacy and Labels: A look at literacy policy and people with a mental handicap.** Downsview, Ontario: Author, 1990.

The Roeher Institute. **On Target? Canada's employment-related programs for persons with disabilities.** North York, Ontario: Author, 1992.

T.V. Ontario. **Lifeline to Literacy: People with disabilities speak out.** Toronto: The Ontario Education Communications Authority, 1989.

White, Joyce. **Organizing Adult Literacy and Basic Education in Canada: A policy and practice discussion document.** Ottawa: The Movement for Canadian Literacy, N.d.

Resource guides

Avanti Resources Guide (1993-94) is an annual listing of over 1000 different titles available for adult basic education workers and students. Resources are selected from commercial and non-commercial sources and include adult readers, tutor training packs, reference books, student workbooks, cassettes and computer software. Available from:

Avanti Books
8 Parsons Green
Boulton Road
Stevenage, Herts
England, SG1 4QG
Tel. (0438) 350155

Guidelines and Support Materials for the Acquisition of Computer-based Adult Literacy Systems (1994), produced by the National Literacy Secretariat, addresses many issues to be considered when buying a computer-based adult literacy system. An annotated bibliography and an overview chart of available systems are included. Available from:

National Literacy Secretariat
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1K5
Tel. (819) 953-5280
Fax. (819) 953-8076

Literacy Materials Bulletin, produced by various programs in B.C., is a useful periodical that reviews literacy materials from large and small group publishers. In addition to bibliographic information, a sample page of the item reviewed is included. Available from:

Adult Literacy Contact Centre
Suite 622
510 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 1L8
Tel. (604) 684-0624
Fax. (604) 684-8520

Suggested Resources for Literacy Programs (2nd ed. 1994), Literacy and Continuing Education Branch of Manitoba Education and Training, is an excellent guide for those who want to start up a literacy collection. It is divided into examples of collections of various sizes and the costs involved in setting them up.

Resource Reading List (1990) is an annotated bibliography of resources by and about Native people produced by the Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with the Native Peoples. It is divided into four sections: (1) Books for Children and Elementary Schools; (2) Teaching Resources; (3) Books for Youth and Adults; (4) Back of the Book (periodicals, publishers and indexes). Available from:

Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native Peoples
P.O. Box 574, Stn. P
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2T1
Tel. (416) 588-2712

The Learning Centre: Adult basic education using computers (1992) reports on the establishment of a literacy centre that incorporates the use of computers and other technologies. It is published by the Ottawa Board of Education and includes two volumes. Available from:

Ottawa Board of Education
330 Gilmour Street
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0P9

Good Materials and Where to Find Them — An Adult Literacy Resource Guide (1987). In addition to information on assessing adult literacy materials, this guide provides a publisher's list, reviews and notes on ordering overseas materials. Available from:

Metropolitan Toronto Movement for Literacy
9 St. Joseph Street, Suite 302
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 1J6
Tel. (416) 961-4013

Program-based Literacy Materials Catalogue: A project of the Ontario Regional Literacy Desktop Publishers (1994). Items in this catalogue are grouped by publisher. They include learner-written materials, tutor-practitioner tools and materials designed for interest reading. Two pages are devoted to each item: author, description of the item, level, date published and distributor are featured on the first page, while the second page contains an illustration from the item itself. Available from:

Program Based Materials Project
Southwestern Literacy Clearinghouse
600 Oakdale Ave.
Sarnia, Ontario N7V 2A9
Tel. (519) 332-6855

Telling Our Stories Our Way (1990) is a Canadian guide to materials for women learning to read. Items reviewed include stories, personal accounts, biographies, poetry and information books on health. Available from:

Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women
47 Main Street
Toronto, Ontario M4E 2V6
Tel. (416) 699-1909

Booknotes: Recommended reading for Adult Literacy Students (1990) is a collection of short, informative reviews intended to serve as a catalogue for those aiming to present good literature to adult students of literacy. Available from:

"Booknotes"
Adult Literacy Unit
Adelaide College of TAFE
Light Square, Adelaide 5000
Australia

Read Easy (1990) is a book of reading resources for adults with an intellectual disability. It is divided into three sections: print materials, audio-visual materials and tutor materials. Available from:

J. Whitaker and Sons Ltd.
12 Dyott Street
London WC1A 1DF
England.

This list of resource guides was provided by ALPHA Ontario

(The Literacy and Language Training Resource Centre)
21 Park Road
Toronto, Ontario M4W 2N1
Tel. (416) 397-5900
1-800-363-0007
Fax: (416) 397-5915
TDD: (416) 397-5901

Plain language and learner writing

There is a growing body of plain language and learner-writing material available. For more complete listings consult the resource guides above. The following is a sampling of available material:

Carneiro, Isaura. **Where There Is a Will There Is a Way.** Toronto: St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program Publications, 1994.

Collie, Robert. **Getting Along.** Toronto: East End Literacy Press, 1985.

Doiron, Rose. **My Name is Rose.** Toronto: East End Literacy Press, 1987.

Jeffery, Sherrill. **Rings, Watches, and Me: My day in a jewellery store.** Edmonton: Prospects Literacy Association, 1994.

North York Board of Education. **Pat's Poems.** North York, Ontario: Author, N.d.

The Read-Write Centre, Kingston Literacy. **I Live My Own Life Now.** Kingston: Author, N.d.

The Read-Write Centre, Kingston Literacy. **If We Had Only Known.** Kingston: Author, N.d.

The Read-Write Centre, Kingston Literacy. **Merry-Go-Rides.** Kingston: Author, 1991.

The Roeher Institute. **The Right to Control What Happens to Your Body.** North York, Ontario: Author, 1991.

The Roeher Institute. **The Right to Fair and Equal Treatment.** North York, Ontario: Author, 1991.

The Roeher Institute. **The Right to Have Enough Money.** Downsview, Ontario: Author, 1990.

The Roeher Institute. **The Right to Have a Job.** North York, Ontario: Author, 1994.

The Roeher Institute. **The Right to Read and Write.** North York, Ontario: Author, 1991.

Symons, Louise. **Meeting Anne Murray.** Edmonton: Prospects Literacy Association, 1994.

Movement for Canadian Literacy

Provincial and Territorial Literacy Coalitions and Contacts

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P.E.I. Literacy Alliance
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Charlottetown, PEI C1A 7K7
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Fax: (902) 628-8178
Executive Director: Dianne Morrow

New Brunswick Committee on Literacy
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Fax: (506) 459-0007
Promotions Coordinator: Jan Greer

Newfoundland Literacy Development Council
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St. John's, Newfoundland A1E 1T2
Phone: (709) 738-7323
Executive Director: Wayne Taylor

Additional resources

Canadian Association for Community Living

Kinsmen Building
York University
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North York, Ontario
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Tel: (416) 661-9611
Fax: (416) 661-5701
TDD: (416) 661-2023

People First of Canada

489 College St.
Suite 308
Toronto, Ontario
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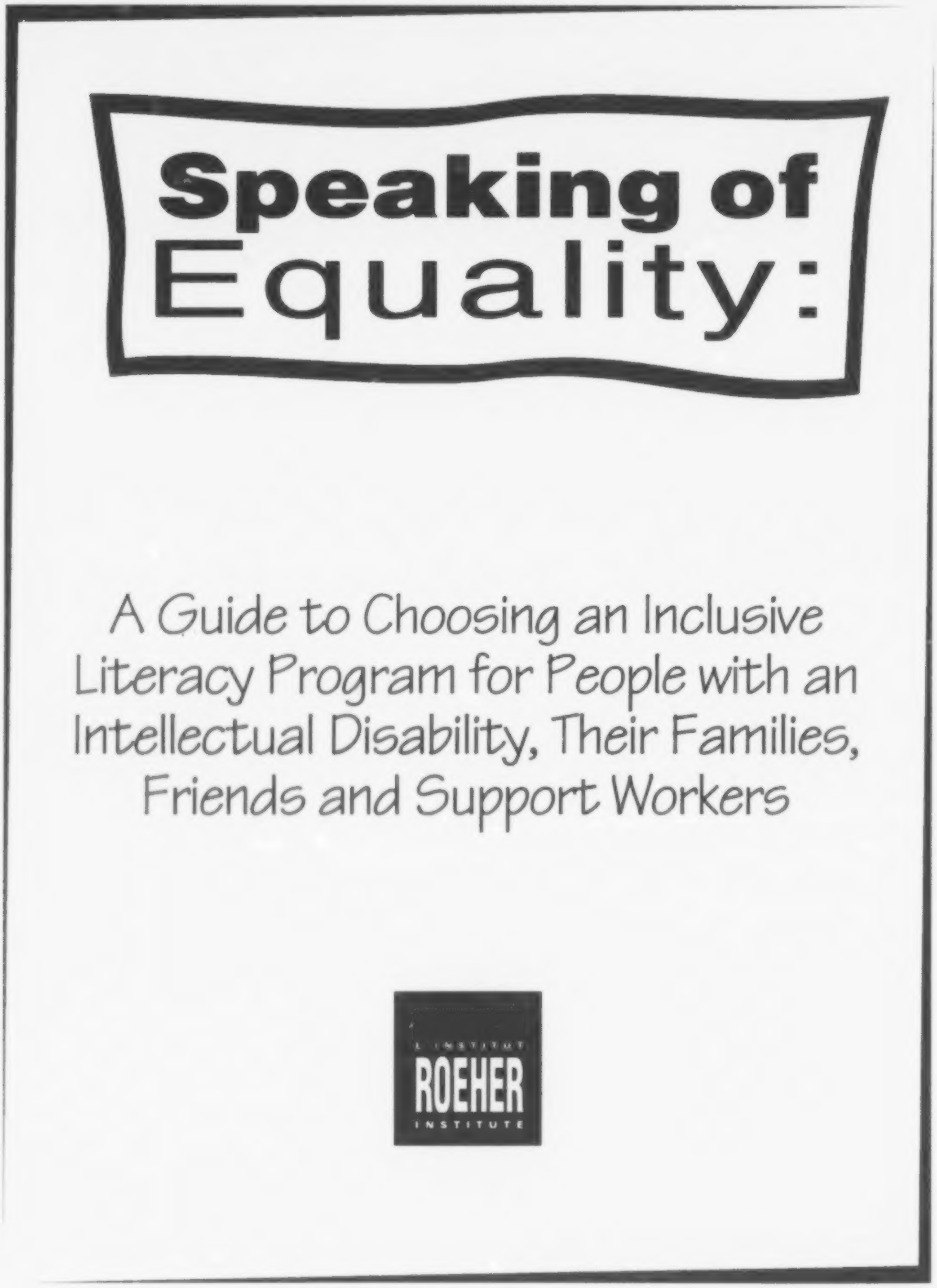
Tel: (416) 920-9530
Fax: (416) 920-9503

Appendix



Speaking of Equality:

A Guide to Choosing an Inclusive Literacy Program for People with an Intellectual Disability, Their Families, Friends and Support Workers

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Introduction

In Canada, all citizens have the right to an education

Rights are the rules that mean people are equal and have equal opportunities. All people are entitled to the same rights under the law. Though all citizens have the right to an education, the reality is that many people with disabilities cannot read or write or use numbers. This is mainly because they have never had a chance to learn. This lack of access to education — including literacy education — is unfair. There are laws in Canada that protect people from being treated unfairly.

More and more people with disabilities are learning about their rights. They are realizing they have the right to read and write. Many want to join literacy programs across Canada. Having the chance to take part in literacy education gives people a greater voice in their community. People join literacy programs to learn many different things. One person may want to enroll in a literacy program to learn to write his or her own name. That is a very positive goal because it means the person can sign important papers. It may also mean the person can be on a voter's list and have the same right as other people in Canadian society at election time, the right to vote.

Literacy courses are given in libraries, community centres, schools and at work. Different programs have different ways of teaching literacy. Programs that allow the individual student to choose what he or she wants to learn take a "learner-centred approach". Studies show that learner-centred programs are the best at including people with different abilities. Learners say that learner-centred programs also help them personally because they feel more empowered and in control of their lives.

This manual takes a learner-centred approach by putting learners' concerns first. It gives questions a learner might want to ask at an interview with a literacy program to get important information. With this information, a learner is better able to choose the literacy program that best meets his or her needs.

It is hoped that this manual will help people exercise their rights as they look for a second chance at education as adults.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Article 15

(1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination, and in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Declaration and recommendations from the International Literacy Seminar in Toronto (1988)

"Literacy is a basic human right for the advancement of all people around the world...

Justice demands that the problems of illiteracy must be attacked in a world that possesses all the means and resources to do so...

In order to promote social justice and equality, the special needs of oppressed people must be recognized and met in literacy programs. This includes: women, indigenous peoples, minorities, the unemployed, and people who have been labelled and excluded."

Questions You Can Ask in a Literacy Interview

Question 1:

What do you need to know about my disability?

The issue:

Over the years, many labels have been used to describe people who have an intellectual disability. Often these labels are hurtful. They tend to look at things people cannot do, their "deficits". These labels often limit the possibilities for people. For the person, the label itself may have no meaning: their abilities and strengths, their interests and their life experiences are much more important.

It is most important that literacy educators know the kinds of supports a person may need so he or she can gain literacy skills.

What you need to listen for:

Staff working in literacy programs that include people with disabilities will be more interested in what you want to learn, than about labels. They will probably ask you what information you would like to share with them about your disability.

Question 2:
What do you mean by literacy?

The issue:

Many people argue over what "literacy" is. Some say that "basic literacy" is being able to read and write a short, simple sentence about life. Others say literacy is being able to read and write or use numbers.

Literacy is important because it makes it possible for people to communicate using written words. It is also important because it gives people knowledge and power.

People who can read and write are called **literate.**
People who can't read and write are called **illiterate.**
Everyone has the right to become **literate.**
No one wants to be labelled **illiterate.**

Not being able to read and write makes it hard for people to be full members of society. Without literacy skills, it is hard to know as much as people who can read and it is hard to feel equal or as good as people who can read and write.

What you need to listen for:

Programs that are inclusive respect everyone's potential and accept all students on equal terms. Literacy tutors in those programs take a helpful approach and believe every person can build literacy skills.

Question 3:

What is the philosophy of your literacy program?

The issue:

Many people say basic literacy is having the reading and writing skills you need to take part fully in our society. Another definition is that literacy is more than reading and writing and using numbers. It says people also need life skills and knowledge to grow.

The learner-centred approach accepts that learning is a two-way street between a tutor and learner. The learner gains new skills and the tutor finds out about the experiences and challenges learners face in their lives. Learners are supported to say what their wishes are and how they want to learn.

"Critical literacy" means skills gained by people who don't usually have a voice in making decisions about the things that concern them. They may be poor, or women or people from a visible minority or they may have a disability. They are pushed to the side in society and are discriminated against. Learning these skills makes it possible for them to tell their interests and needs to more people.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive literacy programs encourage learners to direct their own learning so they can:

☐ build their self-confidence

☐ participate more fully in society

☐ work towards empowerment

☐ challenge society to change.

Question 4:
How do you decide if someone is literate or illiterate?

The issue:

It is hard to measure the literacy level of a person with an intellectual disability.

For centuries people believed that it was not possible for some people to learn to read or write. Many people have lived their lives in institutions where they were given few opportunities for their talents and skills to grow. Many others were sent to separate schools where they had no chance to learn along with other children in their neighbourhoods.

Sometimes the last grade a person reached in school is used to decide a person's level of literacy. But this is not very useful for people who have not had a chance to go to school. Instead of using a school grade, another way is to find out how a person uses reading and writing for other goals. In 1990, Statistics Canada set four "comfort levels" with reading, writing and numeracy to see the literacy levels of Canadians.

No one knows what level of literacy people with an intellectual disability have.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive literacy programs see that the term "illiterate" is hurtful. Out of respect for new learners they will find other ways to talk about some people who have not had the opportunity for much education or schooling.

Tutors know that if people are given enough time and the right teaching, most can become literate. A lot depends on whether the learner has the right learning tools.

Question 5:
What do you need to know about the issues facing me in my life?

The issue:

People looking for inclusive literacy programs have been left out of their communities in many ways. There have been some good changes but many people are still left on the sidelines. Many have not had the chance to take part in the things that most people enjoy. And they face discrimination and hurtful attitudes everywhere.

Most policies and programs of organizations and governments leave out some people. Literacy policies and programs do this too and it affects people's lives a great deal. People with disabilities face many issues in their lives.

A. Institutions

In the past many people with intellectual disabilities were placed in institutions — sometimes for the rest of their lives. Most institutions were not set up for teaching people to read and write. Institutions did not prepare people to live in the community. Doctors labelled and measured people's intelligence (IQs) and this caused many problems in people's lives. All this led to fear and prejudice about people with disabilities.

Today more people know that, with good supports, a person is less handicapped by a disability. More people also agree that it was unjust to deny people their rights.

Today most provinces and territories have promised to close their institutions. They are now moving people back to their communities.

Fortunately, today most people with intellectual disabilities live in communities across the country — with their families, in group homes, in apartments or houses with friends or by themselves.

B. Education

In most communities across Canada, students are still set apart in special schools or in special classes in regular schools. Setting people apart puts a label on them and tells the rest of the community that they are different in a negative way. When children are separated, they and other children do not have the chance to learn about one another and from one another.

Very few people with disabilities finish high school so they do not have the literacy and numeracy skills to cope with all the demands of today's society. Without these skills, few are able to get jobs.

66 per cent of people with an intellectual disability between 15 and 64 years of age have less than a Grade 9 education.

C. Employment

Employers tend to see a person's disability, rather than their possible abilities as an employee. This means people often find themselves in separate "sheltered workshops". There they work with other people with disabilities and are paid below the minimum wage. They can't get other jobs because they have not had a chance to become literate. Most jobs ask for at least a Grade 9 education. Most jobs are advertised in print and most job applications are made in writing so people who cannot read or write are not able to apply for these jobs.

Only 28 per cent of people with intellectual disabilities have jobs.

61 per cent of people with intellectual disabilities with jobs work in sheltered settings.

D. Poverty

Most adults who cannot read or write are poor. Without literacy, most people have fewer chances to escape poverty. Most people who don't know how to read and write don't have enough money because they don't have real jobs. Without a real job most people have to depend on welfare, which means they won't ever have enough money for all their needs.

So people with intellectual disabilities are often poor. They don't have good food. They don't have as many opportunities as other people. Even if they learn to read and write and get a job, chances are the job will pay minimum wage or just a bit more. People with disabilities often have to buy extra things or pay for extra services because of their disability, but they do not get extra wages to pay for these things.

89 per cent of adults with an intellectual disability have an income of less than $10,000 a year.

E. Health

Poor people also sometimes have poor health. People who do not make much money and who cannot read or write face "double jeopardy". They have living conditions that are worse than most people and they cannot get information to help them change those conditions.

If people cannot read they sometimes have trouble following health instructions. They cannot read safety warnings on pill bottles and may accidentally mix up medications or take too much medication, which hurts them. They may be missing out on good information about how to eat well and live in a healthy way. But even if people have good information, lack of money means they usually have a poor diet. They may be hungry most of the time. Someone who is hungry has a harder time focusing on a task and learning.

F. Friendship and community

People who have not had the chance to become literate feel cut off from other people in their community. It is harder to join clubs or go to restaurants or join in community activities.

Many people who are concerned about the lives of people with disabilities have found that many people with disabilities don't have friends.

Being set apart from the rest of the community is a big barrier to making friends because it means those people do not have many chances to meet other people. Services and support workers can stop people from making friends if the rules they make keep people apart from others and alone. Attitudes are another barrier. Many people cannot imagine why anyone would even be interested in having close friendships with people with disabilities.

G. Violence and abuse

People with disabilities are vulnerable to many kinds of violence and abuse. They are discriminated against in many ways every day. They often find themselves in situations where others have power over them. People around them may not notice the violence or abuse that happens to them.

Violent and abusive acts that happen to people with disabilities may be just one or many of these:

☐ Physical force (hitting or slapping)

☐ Physical actions that take the form of care (giving medications, using restraints)

☐ Unwanted physical actions that are sexual (unwanted sexual intercourse or fondling)

☐ Denial of a person's rights, necessities, privileges or opportunities by a care-giver

☐ Threatening or hurtful remarks

☐ A lack of proper action (not doing anything about abuse).

(From* Harm's Way: The Many Faces of Violence and Abuse against Persons with Disabilities, *The Roeher Institute, 1995.)

What you need to listen for:

People who run inclusive literacy programs know how important it is for people to learn literacy skills. They know that people may have many painful realities in their lives. They know that literacy education can give people skills to better deal with these issues. As more people move from institutions and segregated settings to the community, they have much more need for literacy skills so they can manage their lives well.

Literacy helps people avoid poverty and poor health.
Literacy leads to chances to get real jobs.
Literacy makes it easier to join in community life.
Literacy improves the chances of getting fair treatment.

Question 6:

Is your program inclusive?

The issue:

Inclusive literacy programs have instructors and tutors who know without a doubt that everyone can learn. People who teach will show confidence that they can build literacy skills. They will see the barriers that stop people from getting ahead.

They will know how much courage it took for the person to come to the literacy program and they will create a safe, friendly feeling. Learners will be supported to make choices based on their interests and learning goals. Learners' life experiences will be the learning tools.

Sometimes negative attitudes stop people from being able to take part in literacy programs:

☐ the belief that learners with an intellectual disability cannot learn or develop literacy skills;

☐ the idea that they will not keep up with what is being taught;

☐ the belief that it is the individual's fault that they can't learn, not the fault of the policy of the program failing to meet the needs of the individual;

☐ the belief that most adults with disabilities will not learn beyond a Grade 3 or 4 level;

☐ the idea that even if individuals do make progress this will not make any difference in their lives;

☐ the belief that a learner with disabilities makes the literacy program look bad.

These attitudes have to be changed because they are preventing some people from getting their fair chance to enter a literacy program.

What you need to listen for:

A program that is truly inclusive will not have those negative beliefs. The program will help people to take part by having positive attitudes:

☐ the belief in people and their abilities to learn;

☐ the desire to get to know the person first and build their self-confidence;

☐ the belief that a goal can be set and small steps can be taken to reach the goal.

Question 7:
Who funds this program?

The issue:

In Canada, each province is in charge of its own education. Each province decides how much money is spent to teach adults to read and write. It provides that money for adults to learn literacy skills in its schools. There are also many organizations not run in schools by the government that teach people to read, write and work with numbers. Sometimes the government pays to help run these organizations.

There are many places that offer literacy programs:

☐ community centres

☐ libraries

☐ school boards

☐ community colleges

☐ vocational schools and many places where people work.

What you need to listen for:

In Canada, people are being taught in inclusive literacy programs in many different ways in their communities. Although barriers still exist, there is proof that it is possible to include people in a number of different settings.

Question 8:
Are there enough literacy programs for everyone who wants to attend one?

The issue:

There is not enough funding of literacy education in Canada. This means that there are waiting lists, not enough staff and not enough supports to help them do their job well. Not enough funding makes it even harder for learners who need lots of support to get a place in a class.

As yet, there are no policies to make sure everyone can be included in literacy classes. So there is a danger of people being unfairly left out of classes.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive programs advocate for people to be included in regular classes in community literacy programs. They speak up about the successes people have had. They offer training for other tutors. They make sure that when literacy policy is being made the needs of people with intellectual disabilities are included. They reach out and help other groups set up literacy programs.

Question 9:

Is your program free or are there costs?

The issue:

Some literacy programs are free but others have a fee. These costs can stop people from joining literacy programs. The cost of programs and the costs of getting to the program are barriers because people with intellectual disabilities are so short of money. For some people, there are also the costs of attendant care or other personal supports. All this may make learners feel it is too hard to go to literacy classes.

In some provinces, adults getting social assistance are not allowed to take literacy classes while they are getting assistance. Some people who get unemployment insurance run into problems keeping their benefits when they start a full-time literacy program.

What you need to listen for:

It is important to know how much it will cost to learn.

- ☐ Is there a program fee? If yes, how much is it?
- ☐ Will there be other expenses, such as transportation?
- ☐ Will joining a literacy program mean losing some of your social assistance or unemployment benefits?

You may need to find someone who can help to answer these questions and solve any problems that may arise.

Question 10:
What supports and services do you provide?

The issue:

In order for people to attend programs they may need certain supports and services. Programs need to be free of physical barriers. They may have to offer classes in the day and the evening. People who teach literacy will need to understand that learners may have many tough issues in their lives and the tutors will have to be willing to offer advice, support and friendship. Some learners may need child care or counselling. Others may need computers to help them speak or hear.

Some people may need attendant care and personal support so they can take literacy classes. They may need these personal supports when they eat or want to use the washroom or for turning the pages of a book.

One problem is that even when there is government money for attendant care, taking literacy programs is not seen as something the government wants to give people money to do. Or the time of day or week a person can get an attendant is not when the literacy program is running.

Adults who need transportation to get to the program have problems, too. Special buses and vans for people with disabilities have to be booked way ahead of time.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive programs know that they must provide supports so their literacy classes can include everyone.

☐ Is there a ramp, for example?

☐ Is child care available?

☐ Are there counsellors?

☐ Is the program offered in the day-time and the evening, for flexibility?

☐ Are there people to provide personal supports at mealtime, for example?

Sometimes the supports can come from the literacy program itself. In other cases, they can come from others in the person's life, from families, friends and support workers.

Question 11:
What sorts of things could I learn to read?

The issue:

Learners need materials that are written in plain, straightforward language. These materials need to provide a lot of information. This information might be about how to use the health care system. It might be about how to apply for benefits. It might be about how to appeal decisions of government officials on allowances and social assistance. It might be about rights and responsibilities. It might be about how to use the legal aid system.

In addition, learners need materials that talk about the experiences of adults living with an intellectual disability. A big challenge for adults beginning to read is being able to find meaning in what they read. Some literacy programs help adult learners begin their literacy education with their own stories. Some programs also provide ways of publishing the work of learners.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive literacy programs will be able to show examples of books and other materials that are in clear, straightforward words and design. They will also have books of learners' stories and experiences. You might ask whether the program has books about living in an institution or working at a workshop.

Question 12:

Are my individual needs going to be met?

The issue:

Some ways of teaching do not work because they do not suit the student. Students need to be in control of their learning. Often in the past they learned to depend on others. Each person must want to learn for their own reasons, not for other people's reasons. They should choose what they want to learn and why. It is important that the learner helps choose books and materials. Even though the learners are only beginning to read, these books should not be childish because the learners are adults.

Many learners prefer to work one-to-one with a tutor at first because they feel a little shy. However, tutors may feel there are some good points to learning in a group. The discussions are lively and often students want to teach one another.

Successful programs see the unique needs of each learner.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive literacy programs will ask new learners what they want to learn and then come up with a plan to help them reach those goals. The learning is based on the goals of the student. Each student will be able to choose methods and materials.

If you know what you want to learn, this would be a good time to say what your goal is and to see whether the program will be able to help you reach your goal.

Question 13:

Can you give me a list of things I would do in my class?

The issue:

There are many methods used in teaching reading, writing and numeracy to help people reach their goals. No single method always works. Whatever works for an individual learner becomes a good teaching method. Here are a few ideas that have been used successfully.

A. Language experience writing

Students tell their ideas to their tutors and then learn to read these stories, first with help and then alone. Tutors may need to help learners get their ideas out. Sometimes the first sentence has only two or three words. Ideas come more quickly when the learner begins to see that their stories are worth writing.

B. Stories and other reading material on topics the learner knows about

Stories about living in an institution or working in a sheltered workshop let others know what these kinds of lives were like. Stories also give other learners reading material they can understand.

C. Computer-assisted literacy

The computer is good for learning because it lets people repeat things over and over. A tutor is still needed to give encouragement and support. It is important that people know how to use the skills they learn on the computer in their daily life. This can lead to improvements in reading and communication skills as well as self-confidence.

D. Using material that fits with the learner's goals

These might include recipes, bus timetables, menus, charts or graphs from a job or from home. When learners bring materials to the class from home, it helps them get involved in the learning process.

E. Assisted or paired reading from accessible books and taped books

Sharing the reading by taking turns or by reading in pairs at the same time are good methods for learners. Some of the most useful books may have only two or four sentences on each page. Some will also have a picture to give the learner a clear idea of what the story is about. A tutor or another member of the group may help students teach one another.

F. Doing things outside the classroom to get discussion going

Going for a walk or doing something outside the classroom may be an easier way of starting a conversation. Talking about life experiences may be hard for some people.

G. Collecting people's stories and putting them in a binder

Other learner's stories can be useful reading materials. These stories can be kept in a binder and arranged by reading level. Other learners in the program can read them.

H. Group work

Learners working in groups can use the blackboard to write a letter together about a situation or issue that concerns them all.

I. Making collages out of magazines

Cutting out articles or pictures from magazines is a good way of bringing up topics to talk about and finding out the person's interests.

J. Having a lot of different materials to work with

Having a lot of materials gives different ways to help the learner understand and remember. Programs that have a lot of different materials have many ways to interest learners. It is easier to learn if the examples are interesting and easy to understand. If the examples are about things not familiar to students, they will lose interest.

What you need to listen for:

If one of these suggestions is not clear, ask for more information. If one of them sounds interesting, speak up about it. You now have some ideas about what you might like to do if you decide to join the program.

Question 14:
Do you work in partnership with other programs?

The issue:

Partnerships among literacy programs and other education, training, employment and recreational places are very important. Learners need support when they want to take part in work or other learning opportunities. People who teach can help the person find educational, training and recreational programs that match their interests.

Partnerships also means reaching out to people in the community and in institutions who might like to have literacy skills. It means advocating for access to all literacy programs so that people with disabilities have choices about where they go.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive programs have information on other services to assist students. They also link students to other people who can help in the community such as people at multicultural agencies, work training, jobs or with unemployment insurance.

Question 15:
Do you encourage friends, families and supporters of the learner to be involved?

The issue:

Partnerships with people in other parts of an adult's life are important for adult learners. When the person agrees, it can be helpful to them if their support workers, family members, friends or co-workers can be involved. These people can help with learning at home, at work or elsewhere. They can use some of the methods that work in the literacy program to create other chances to learn in daily life.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive programs encourage other people in the learner's life to be involved. They know the importance of a support network and welcome others to help the person learn.

Question 16:
How will I be evaluated?

The issue:

Inclusive programs welcome any student who wants in the program. The only rule is that they want help with their reading and writing. People who teach may want to know a person's reading level. They want this information to match the learner with a suitable tutor, not to keep people out. As a way to get this information, a tutor might talk to the person and listen to their history. The tutor would not do a formal assessment, knowing it can be frightening.

Tutors look for signs of success in a person's life outside the classroom. When students take more responsibility for their own learning that is also considered a sign of success.

What you need to listen for:

People who teach in inclusive literacy programs know that tests can scare learners. They need to be flexible about how they will evaluate someone.

Question 17:
What are your tutors like?

The issue:

Literacy programs that are successful at including people need tutors who are supportive. Tutors have to respect the learners. They need good listening skills. They need to be eager and have a good sense of humour. They need to have a positive attitude and confidence about the learners' skills. They will value the deeper understanding they will get when people talk to them about the realities of their lives. They will want the tutor and learner to be equal.

Tutors understand how important it is to create a safe place to learn. They know that most learners have had a bad time in school. They know the importance of building people's self-confidence.

What you need to listen for:

Good tutors are sure that everyone can build literacy skills. They are good at working with people. They see the obstacles people with disabilities have to overcome just to get to the literacy program. They can draw out and use the learner's life experiences as learning tools.

Question 18:

What kind of tutor training do you give?

The issue:

Tutor training is key to creating inclusive programs. It is a chance for the program to build enthusiasm for inclusion. Everyone in the program should support inclusion, not just one or two individuals. Training is also a time for people who teach to share teaching methods and ideas. People may also want to talk about how to best support certain students, and how to know when tutors and learners are being successful.

Some of the best training is done by the learners themselves just by talking about their experiences and answering questions. It is also a chance for learners to read some of their writings.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive literacy programs provide training to new tutors in which they learn to be sensitive about the issues facing people with disabilities. The tutors can hear about these issues from students. Learners' stories about their emotions and their struggle are read out loud. Often there is time for questions and answers where tutors learn about students' experiences as a result of having been labelled.

Question 19:

Do you keep information confidential? Will you check with me about what information you share?

The issue:

Some tutors prefer to have information about the learner with whom they will be working. They like to have this information before they start working with the person. Others prefer not to have information ahead of time. They do not want to form an idea about the person before they meet. They want to get to know the learner over time. Most people who run programs and teach agree that adult learners themselves should be the ones who decide whether they wish to share information about themselves and with whom they wish to share it.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive literacy programs have a policy that says students need to be asked first whether they want to share personal information at all. If they do agree to share, the student can say who they want to share it with before any information is given to anyone.

Question 20:
What happens if the learner-tutor pair does not work out?

The issue:

Good programs need strong leaders who will deal with situations that don't work out. Good leadership means sometimes the person running the program has to get involved with situations. For example, when problems come up — a student arrives late or not at all, a tutor feels things are not going well in class, or a tutor-student match does not seem to be working out — the leader is willing to help. They might phone to see if the student is ill or call a meeting with the learner's support network. They might change the tutor-learner match or the timetable.

Even the best matching process cannot make sure that every tutor-learner team will work out. Learners and tutors should feel free to say when things are not working well.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive literacy programs know that they must listen when students talk about the realities of their lives. They know they must listen to what students say about problems with a certain tutor and do something about it, such as arrange another match.

Question 21:

Can my support worker or family member or friend come to the literacy program with me?

The issue:

Some learners may need to go to a literacy programs with a care-giver (family member, friend or paid care-giver). The care-giver may need to provide help or physical care to the individual. He or she may also be able to support the literacy skills the learner is gaining in the program.

The learner needs to say what they would like their care-giver to do and if their care-giver needs to be in the class. Maybe the care-giver can be in another room during the class and come only when needed. It shows respect to other learners when you are aware that the care-giver in the class changes the learning environment for everyone. It is a good idea to discuss this with the group beforehand.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive programs will be flexible and will meet the needs of the individual student. They know that a person who needs secure and reliable support will need that support to take part in, and learn in, a literacy program.

Question 22:
Can I be on the board?

The issue:

The challenge for literacy education is to help people learn to read and write as a means of empowerment. Helping people gain these skills gives them a way to be a part of community life.

Inviting speakers to talk about important issues of the day helps people to learn. When they begin to see problems they may all share, they may find a way to act together.

When students hold meetings, reach out to other groups, write letters, invite speakers and take on important positions, they are using literacy skills that will make an important difference in their lives. It ensures that their voice is heard in their broader communities.

What you need to listen for:

Inclusive literacy programs will encourage a learner-centred approach to literacy. They will help learners gain the skills needed for personal empowerment and social change. One way of doing that is by giving learners a chance to take on important positions, such as sitting on the board of directors.

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